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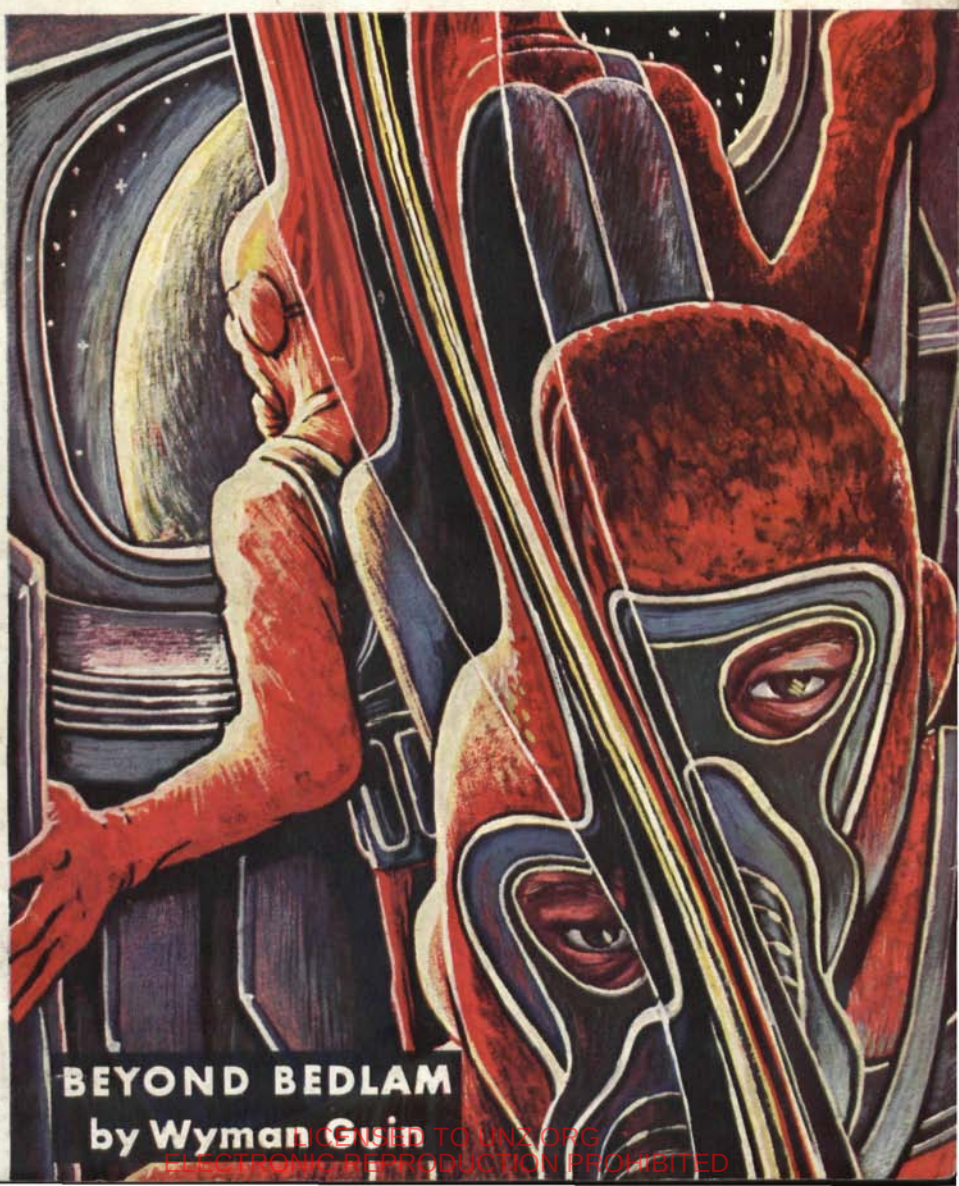

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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Ask A Foolish Question

THE questions laymen ask cabbies, doctors, engineers, soda jerkers and so on would no doubt make a fascinating monograph. The one asked most often of writers, and especially writers of science fiction, is, "Where do you *get* those ideas?"

Actually, this is perhaps the least significant question a reader can ask. Ideas come from anywhere — newspapers, overheard conversations, books, other writers' stories, speculation both idle and frantic, depending, of course, on whether a deadline must be met.

Only rarely does a writer remember the instant of inspiration. Out of the hundreds of stories and scripts I have written, for instance, I recall only one such moment. I was trudging through the rain without an umbrella, the usual random thoughts blurting and mumbling in my mind, when I found myself sub-vocalizing an old song having to do with walking between raindrops. That started a mental train ending with a caboose called *Trouble With Water,* which P. G. Wodehouse is being good enough to include in an anthology of modern humor.

All my other writing, though, has been the result of mostly harried and often morose discarding of one idea after another. This is generally true of professional writers. When an idea worth writing—or one that *seems* to be—is finally dredged up, skinny and pale and unlovely, it is almost always surrounded by the even skinnier cadavers of dud notions.

The layman's question should be, "What do you *do* with ideas once you get them?"

Beyond Bedlam, this month's novella, introducing a literarily muscular new writer named Wyman Guin, is a fine example. Its genesis is the statistical fact that the hospital load of schizophrenic patients is steadily rising. How this should come to Guin's attention is not remarkable—he's advertising director of Lakeside Laboratories, a pharmaceutical house, and keeping up with medical science is an important part of his job.

Well, this is approximately *where* he got his idea.

As you can see, that doesn't answer the big question—what did Guin *do* with his idea?

There were several plot directions that he explored systematically:

● The hypothetical causes of the great increase, such as secret

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weapons, invasions from space, mental instead of embryonic twinning, etc. Unable to make himself violate established psychiatric theory, Guin abandoned this line of thought.

⊙ The possible effects on civilization if a minority of non-psychotics had to support a majority of hospitalized schizophrenes. Not bad, but not enough to make a story, so he combined it with:

⊙ A society in which schizophrenia is the norm.

Presumably, now that the author knew what his attack was to be, his biggest problem was solved. It was, actually, just beginning. For example . . .

⊙ Should he build the proposed society for horror, humor, moralistic analogy, warning, or what?

⊙ Should the characters be rational or irrational by our standards?

⊙ Since all stories need character conflict, what would be the basis for it in this fictional setup?

If Guin had been writing conventional science fiction, he could have worked it out very easily:

⊙ A society created for horror through violence, by exaggerating present so-called normal behavior; pre-scientific "humor" as in the 18th Century attitude toward psychosis; effortless political satire to show how similar our society is to a psychotic one.

⊙ Irrational characters, of course, for melodramatic purposes.

⊙ Conflict on the grand scale—rebels, normal according to our view, who want to overturn the schizophrenic world.

Guin, however, had read hundreds of stories like that. What lover of science fiction hasn't? And so . . .

⊙ We have a schizophrenic society with a system of ethics, education, morals, laws, etiquette, *inter*personal and *intra*personal relationships that are consistent with its psychological basis.

⊙ Since the only unchanging aspect of standards is that they are constantly changing, the characters must be rational by their own standards and not ours.

⊙ Conflict should come from the *inter*personal and *intra*personal relationships that a schizophrenic society makes possible. Here Guin found really rich soil, as you'll discover when you read the story.

THUS, asking Wyman Guin where he got the idea of *Beyond Bedlam* is recognizably mere social conversation. If he can answer it at all, it would reveal nothing whatever of the weeks of work that changed the seed of thought into a living, moving story.

For those who want to slide into GALAXY with their first stories, and feel offended when

(*Continued on Page* 159)

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BEYOND BEDLAM

By

WYMAN GUIN

However fantastic it may seem, the society so elaborately described in this story has its seeds in ours. Just check the data . . .

THE opening afternoon class for Mary Walden's ego-shift was almost over, and Mary was practically certain the teacher would not call on her to recite her assignment, when Carl Blair got it into his mind to try to pass her a dirty note. Mary knew it would be a screamingly funny Ego-Shifting Room limerick and was about to reach for the note when Mrs. Harris's voice crackled through the room.

"Carl Blair! I believe you have

Illustrated by DAVID STONE

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an important message. Surely you will want the whole class to hear it. Come forward, please."

As he made his way before the class, the boy's blush-covered freckles reappeared against his growing pallor. Haltingly and in an agonized monotone, he recited from the note:

"There was a young hyper
named Phil,
Who kept a third head for a
thrill.
Said he, 'It's all right,
I enjoy my plight:
I shift my third out when it's
chill.'"

The class didn't dare laugh. Their eyes burned down at their laps in shame. Mary managed to throw Carl Blair a compassionate glance as he returned to his seat, but she instantly regretted ever having been kind to him.

"Mary Walden, you seemed uncommonly interested in reading something just now. Perhaps you wouldn't mind reading your assignment to the class."

There it was, and just when the class was almost over. Mary could have scratched Carl Blair. She clutched her paper grimly and strode to the front.

"Today's assignment in Pharmacy History is, 'Schizophrenia since the Ancient Pre-pharmacy days.'" Mary took enough breath to get into the first paragraph.

"Schizophrenia is where two or more personalities live in the same brain. The ancients of the 20th Century actually looked upon schizophrenia as a disease! Everyone felt it was very shameful to have a schizophrenic person in the family, and, since children lived right with the same parents who had borne them, it was very bad. If you were a schizophrenic child in the 20th Century, you would be locked up behind bars and people would call you—"

Mary blushed and stumbled over the daring word—"crazy." "The ancients locked up strong ego groups right along with weak ones. Today we would lock up those ancient people."

THE class agreed silently.

"But there were more and more schizophrenics to lock up. By 1950 the *prisons* and hospitals were so full of schizophrenic people that the ancients did not have room left to lock up any more. They were beginning to see that soon everyone would be schizophrenic.

"Of course, in the 20th Century, the schizophrenic people were almost as helpless and 'crazy' as the ancient Modern men. Naturally they did not fight wars and lead the silly life of the Moderns, but without proper drugs they couldn't control their

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Ego-shiftability. The personalities in a brain would always be fighting each other. One personality would cut the body or hurt it or make it filthy, so that when the other personality took over the body, it would have to suffer. No, the schizophrenic people of the 20th Century were almost as 'crazy' as the ancient Moderns.

"But then the drugs were invented one by one and the schizophrenic people of the 20th Century were freed of their troubles. With the drugs the personalities of each body were able to live side by side in harmony at last. It turned out that many schizophrenic people, called overendowed personalities, simply had so many talents and viewpoints that it took two or more personalities to handle everything.

"The drugs worked so well that the ancients had to let millions of schizophrenic people out from behind the bars of 'crazy' houses. That was the Great Emancipation of the 1990s. From then on, schizophrenic people had trouble only when they criminally didn't take their drugs. Usually, there are two egos in a schizophrenic person—the hyperalter, or prime ego, and the hypoalter, the alternate ego. There often were more than two, but the Medicorps makes us take our drugs so that won't happen to us.

"At last someone realized that if everyone took the new drugs, the great wars would stop. At the World Congress of 1997, laws were passed to make everyone take the drugs. There were many fights over this because some people wanted to stay Modern and fight wars. The Medicorps was organized and told to kill anyone who wouldn't take their drugs as prescribed. Now the laws are enforced and everybody takes the drugs and the hyperalter and hypoalter are each allowed to have the body for an ego-shift of five days . . ."

Mary Walden faltered. She looked up at the faces of her classmates, started to turn to Mrs. Harris and felt the sickness growing in her head. Six great waves of crescendo silence washed through her. The silence swept away everything but the terror, which stood in her frail body like a shrieking rock.

Mary heard Mrs. Harris hurry to the shining dispensary along one wall of the classroom and return to stand before her with a swab of antiseptic and a disposable syringe.

Mrs. Harris helped her to a chair. A few minutes after the expert injection, Mary's mind struggled back from its core of silence.

"Mary, dear, I'm sorry. I haven't been watching you closely enough."

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"Oh, Mrs. Harris . . ." Mary's chin trembled. "I hope it never happens again."

"Now, child, we all have to go through these things when we're young. You're just a little slower than the others in acclimatizing to the drugs. You'll be fourteen soon and the medicop assures me you'll be over this sort of thing just as the others are."

Mrs. Harris dismissed the class and when they had all filed from the room, she turned to Mary.

"I think, dear, we should visit the clinic together, don't you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Harris." Mary was not frightened now. She was just ashamed to be such a difficult child and so slow to acclimatize to the drugs.

As she and the teacher walked down the long corridor to the clinic, Mary made up her mind to tell the medicop what she thought was wrong. It was not herself. It was her hypoalter, that nasty little Susan Shorrs. Sometimes, when Susan had the body, the things Susan was doing and thinking came to Mary like what the ancients had called *dreams*, and Mary had never liked this secondary ego whom she could never really know. Whatever was wrong, it was Susan's doing. The filthy creature never took care of her hair, it was always so messy when Susan shifted the body to her.

Mrs. Harris waited while Mary went into the clinic.

Mary was glad to find Captain Thiel, the nice medicop, on duty. But she was silent while the X-rays were being taken, and, of course, while he got the blood samples, she concentrated on being brave.

Later, while Captain Thiel looked in her eyes with the bright little light, Mary said calmly, "Do you know my hypoalter, Susan Shorrs?"

The medicop drew back and made some notes on a pad before answering. "Why, yes. She's in here quite often too."

"Does she look like me?"

"Not much. She's a very nice little girl . . ." He hesitated, visibly fumbling.

Mary blurted, "Tell me truly, what's she like?"

Captain Thiel gave her his nice smile. "Well, I'll tell you a secret if you keep it to yourself."

"Oh, I promise."

He leaned over and whispered in her ear and she liked the clean odor of him. "She's not nearly as pretty as you are."

Mary wanted very badly to put her arms around him and hug him. Instead, wondering if Mrs. Harris, waiting outside, had heard, she drew back self-consciously and said, "Susan is the cause of all this trouble, the nasty little thing."

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"Oh now!" the medicop exclaimed. "I don't think so, Mary. She's in trouble, too, you know."

"She still eats sauerkraut." Mary was defiant.

"But what's wrong with that?"

"You told her not to last year because it makes me sick on my shift. But it agrees in buckets with a little pig like her."

The medicop took this seriously. He made a note on the pad. "Mary, you should have complained sooner."

"Do you think my father might not like me because Susan Shorrs is my hypoalter?" she asked abruptly.

"I hardly think so, Mary. After all, he doesn't even know her. He's never on her Ego shift."

"A little bit," Mary said, and was immediately frightened.

Captain Thiel glanced at her sharply. "What do you mean by that, child?"

"Oh, nothing," Mary said hastily. "I just thought maybe he was."

"Let me see your pharmacase," he said rather severely.

Mary slipped the pharmacase off the belt at her waist and handed it to him. Captain Thiel extracted the prescription card from the back and threw it away. He slipped a new card in the taping machine on his desk and punched out a new prescription, which he reinserted in the pharmacase. In the space on the front, he wrote directions for Mary to take the drugs numbered from left to right.

Mary watched his serious face and remembered that he had complimented her about being prettier than Susan. "Captain Thiel, is your hypoalter as handsome as you are?"

The young medicop emptied the remains of the old prescription from the pharmacase and took it to the dispensary in the corner, where he slid it into the filling slot. He seemed unmoved by her question and simply muttered, "Much handsomer."

The machine automatically filled the case from the punched card on its back and he returned it to Mary. "Are you taking your drugs exactly as prescribed? You know there are very strict laws about that, and as soon as you are fourteen, you will be held to them."

Mary nodded solemnly. Great straitjackets, who didn't know there were laws about taking your drugs?

There was a long pause and Mary knew she was supposed to leave. She wanted, though, to stay with Captain Thiel and talk with him. She wondered how it would be if he were appointed her father.

Mary was not hurt that her shy compliment to him had gone

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unnoticed. She had only wanted something to talk about. Finally she said desperately, "Captain Thiel, how is it possible for a body to change as much from one Ego shift to another as it does between Susan and me?"

"There isn't all the change you imagine," he said. "Have you had your first physiology?"

"Yes. I was very good . . ." Mary saw from his smile that her inadvertent little conceit had trapped her.

"Then, Miss Mary Walden, how do *you* think it is possible?"

Why did teachers and medicops have to be this way? When all you wanted was to have them talk to you, they turned everything around and made you think.

She quoted unhappily from her schoolbook, "The main things in an ego shift are the two vegetative nervous systems that translate the conditions of either personality to the blood and other organs right from the brain. The vegetative nervous systems change the rate at which the liver burns or stores sugar and the rate at which the kidneys excrete . . ."

Through the closed door to the other room, Mrs. Harris's voice raised at the visiophone said distinctly, "*But, Mr. Walden . . .*"

"Reabsorb," corrected Captain Thiel.

"What?" She didn't know what to listen to—the medicop or the distant voice of Mrs. Harris.

"It's better to think of the kidneys as reabsorbing salts and nutrients from the filtrated blood."

"Oh."

"But, Mr. Walden, we can overdo a good thing. The proper amount of neglect is definitely required for full development of some personality types and Mary certainly is one of those . . ."

"What about the pituitary gland that's attached to the brain and controls all the other glands during the shift of egos?" pressed Captain Thiel distractingly.

"But, Mr. Walden, too much neglect at this critical point may cause another personality to split off and we can't have that. Adequate personalities are congenital. A new one now would only rob the present personalities. You are the appointed parent of this child and the Board of Education will enforce your compliance with our diagnosis . . ."

Mary's mind leaped to a page in one of her childhood storybooks. It was an illustration of a little girl resting beneath a great tree that overhung a brook. There were friendly little wild animals about. Mary could see the page clearly and she thought about it very hard instead of crying.

"Aren't you interested any more, Mary?" Captain Thiel was looking at her strangely.

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The agitation in her voice was a surprise. "I have to get home. I have a lot of things to do."

Outside, when Mrs. Harris seemed suddenly to realize that something was wrong, and delicately probed to find out whether her angry voice had been overheard, Mary said calmly and as if it didn't matter, "Was my father home when you called him before?"

"Why—yes, Mary. But you mustn't pay any attention to conversations like that, darling."

You can't force him to like me, she thought to herself, and she was angry with Mrs. Harris because now her father would only dislike her more.

Neither her father nor her mother was home when Mary walked into the evening-darkened apartment. It was the first day of the family shift, and on that day, for many periods now, they had not been home until late.

Mary walked through the empty rooms, turning on lights. She passed up the electrically heated dinner her father had set out for her. Presently she found herself at the storage room door. She opened it slowly.

After hesitating a while she went in and began an exhausting search for the old storybook with the picture in it.

Finally she knew she could not find it. She stood in the middle of the junk-filled room and began to cry.

THE day which ended for Mary Walden in lonely weeping should have been, for Conrad Manz, a pleasant rest day with an hour of rocket racing in the middle of it. Instead, he awakened with a shock to hear his wife actually *talking* while she was *asleep.*

He stood over her bed and made certain that she was asleep. It was as though her mind thought it was somewhere else, doing something else. Vaguely he remembered that the ancients did something called *dreaming* while they slept and the thought made him shiver.

Clara Manz was saying, "Oh, Bill, they'll catch us. We can't pretend any more unless we have drugs. Haven't we any drugs, Bill?"

Then she was silent and lay still. Her breathing was shallow and even in the dawn light her cheeks were deeply flushed against the blonde hair.

Having just awakened, Conrad was on a very low drug level and the incident was unpleasantly disturbing. He picked up his pharmacase from beside his bed and made his way to the bathroom. He took his hypothalamic block and the integration enzymes and returned to the bed-

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room. Clara was still sleeping.

She had been behaving oddly for some time, but there had never been anything as disturbing as this. He felt that he should call a medicop, but, of course, he didn't want to do anything that extreme. It was probably something with a simple explanation. Clara was a little scatterbrained at times. Maybe she had forgotten to take her sleeping compound and that was what caused *dreaming*. The very word made his powerful body chill. But if she was neglecting to take any of her drugs and he called in a medicop, it would be serious.

Conrad went into the library and found the *Family Pharmacy*. He switched on a light in the dawn-shrunken room and let his heavy frame into a chair. *A Guide to Better Understanding of your Family Prescriptions. Official Edition, 2831.* The book was mostly Medicorps propaganda and almost never gave a practical suggestion. If something went wrong, you called a medicop.

Conrad hunted through the book for the section on sleeping compound. It was funny, too, about that name Bill. Conrad went over all the men of their acquaintance with whom Clara had occasional affairs or with whom she was friendly and he couldn't remember a single Bill. In fact, the only man with that name whom he could think of was his own hyperalter, Bill Walden. But that was naturally impossible.

Maybe dreaming was always about imaginary people.

SLEEPING COMPOUND: An official mixture of soporific and hypnotic alkaloids and synthetics. A critical drug; an essential feature in every prescription. Slight deviations in following prescription are unallowable because of the subtle manner in which behavior may be altered over months or years. The first sleeping compound was announced by Thomas Marshall in 1986. The formula has been modified only twice since then.

There followed a tightly packed description of the chemistry and pharmacology of the various ingredients. Conrad skipped through this.

The importance of Sleeping Compound in the life of every individual and to society is best appreciated when we recall Marshall's words announcing its initial development:

"It is during so-called *normal* sleep that the vicious unconscious mind responsible for wars and other symptoms of unhappiness develops its resources and its hold on our conscious lives.

"In this *normal* sleep the critical faculties of the cortex are paralyzed. Meanwhile, the infantile unconscious mind expands misinterpreted experience into the toxic patterns of neurosis and psychosis. The conscious mind takes over at morning, unaware that these infantile motivations have been cleverly woven into its very structure.

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"Sleeping Compound will stop this. There is no unconscious activity after taking this harmless drug. We believe the Medicorps should at once initiate measures to acclimatize every child to its use. In these children, as the years go by, infantile patterns unable to work during sleep will fight a losing battle during waking hours with conscious patterns accumulating in the direction of adulthood."

—

That was all there was—mostly the Medicorps patting its own back for saving humanity. But if you were in trouble and called a medicop, you'd risk getting into real trouble.

Conrad became aware of Clara standing in the doorway. The flush of her disturbed emotions and the pallor of her fatigue mixed in ragged banners on her cheeks.

Conrad waved the *Family Pharmacy* with a foolish gesture of embarrassment.

"Young lady, have you been have you been neglecting to take your sleeping compound?"

Clara turned utterly pale. "I—I don't understand."

"You were talking in your sleep."

"I—was?"

She came forward so unsteadily that he helped her to a seat. She stared at him. He asked jovially, "Who is this 'Bill' you were so desperately involved with? Have you been having an affair I don't know about? Aren't my friends good enough for you?"

The result of this banter was that she alarmingly began to cry, clutching her robe about her and dropping her blonde head on her knees and sobbing.

CHILDREN cried before they were acclimatized to the drugs, but Conrad Manz had never in his life seen an adult cry. Though he had taken his morning drugs and certain disrupting emotions were already impossible, nevertheless this sight was completely unnerving.

In gasps between her sobs, Clara was saying, "Oh, I can't go back to taking them! But I can't keep this up! I just can't!"

"Clara, darling, I don't know what to say or do. I think we ought to call the Medicorps."

Intensely frightened, she rose and clung to him, begging, "Oh, no, Conrad, that isn't necessary! It isn't necessary at all. I've only neglected to take my sleeping compound and it won't happen again. All I need is a sleeping compound. Please get my pharmacase for me and it will be all right."

She was so desperate to convince him that Conrad got the pharmacase and a glass of water for her only to appease the white face of fright.

Within a few minutes of taking

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the sleeping compound, she was calm. As he put her back to bed, she laughed with a lazy indolence.

"Oh, Conrad, you take it so seriously. I only needed a sleeping compound very badly and now I feel fine. I'll sleep all day. It's a rest day, isn't it? Now go race a rocket and stop worrying and thinking about calling the medicops."

But Conrad did not go rocket racing as he had planned. Clara had been asleep only a few minutes when there was a call on the visiophone; they wanted him at the office. The city of Santa Fe would be completely out of balance within twelve shifts if revised plans were not put into operation immediately. They were to start during the next five days while he would be out of shift. In order to carry on the first day of their next shift, he and the other three traffic managers he worked with would have to come down today and familiarize themselves with the new operations.

There was no getting out of it. His rest day was spoiled. Conrad resented it all the more because Santa Fe was clear out on the edge of their traffic district and could have been revised out of the Mexican offices just as well. But those boys down there rested all five days of their shift.

Conrad looked in on Clara before he left and found her asleep in the total suspension of proper drug level. The unpleasant memory of her behavior made him squirm, but now that the episode was over, it no longer worried him. It was typical of him that, things having been set straight in the proper manner, he did not think of her again until late in the afternoon.

AS early as 1950, the pioneer communications engineer Norbert Wiener had pointed out that there might be a close parallel between disassociation of personalities and the disruption of a communication system. Wiener referred back specifically to the first clear description, by Morton Prince, of multiple personalities existing together in the same human body. Prince had described only individual cases and his observations were not altogether acceptable in Wiener's time. Nevertheless, in the schizophrenic society of the 29th Century, a major managerial problem was that of balancing the communicating and non-communicating populations in a city.

As far as Conrad and the other traffic men present at the conference were concerned, Santa Fe was a resort and retirement area of 100,000 human bodies, alive and consuming more than they

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produced every day of the year. Whatever the representatives of the Medicorps and Communications Board worked out, it would mean only slight changes in the types of foodstuffs, entertainment and so forth moving into Santa Fe, and Conrad could have grasped the entire traffic change in ten minutes after the real problem had been settled. But, as usual, he and the other traffic men had to sit through two hours while small wheels from the Medicorps and Communications acted big about rebalancing a city.

For them, Conrad had to admit, Santa Fe was a great deal more complex than 100,000 consuming, moderately producing human bodies. It was 200,000 human personalities, two to each body. Conrad wondered sometimes what they would have done if the three and four personality cases so common back in the 20th and 21st Centuries had been allowed to reproduce. The 200,000 personalities in Santa Fe were difficult enough.

Like all cities, Santa Fe operated in five shifts, A, B, C, D, and E.

Just as it was supposed to be for Conrad in his city, today was rest day for the 20,000 hypoalters on D-shift in Santa Fe. Tonight at around 6:00 P.M. they would all go to shifting rooms and be replaced by their hyperalters, who had different tastes in food and pleasure and took different drugs.

Tomorrow would be rest day for the hypoalters on E-shift and in the evening they would turn things over to their hyperalters.

The next day it would be rest for the A-shift hyperalters and three days after that the D-shift hyperalters, including Bill Walden, would rest till evening, when Conrad and the D-shift hypoalters everywhere would again have their five day use of their bodies.

Right now the trouble with Santa Fe's retired population, which worked only for its own maintenance, was that too many elderly people on the D-shift and E-shift had been dying off. This point was brought out by a dapper young department head from Communications.

Conrad groaned when, as he knew would happen, a Medicorps officer promptly set out on an exhaustive demonstration that Medicorps predictions of deaths for Santa Fe had indicated clearly that Communications should have been moving people from D-shift and E-shift into the area.

Actually, it appeared that someone from Communications had blundered and had overloaded the quota of people on A-shift and B-shift moving to

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Santa Fe. Thus on one rest day there weren't enough people working to keep things going, and later in the week there were so many available workers that they were clogging the city.

None of this was heated exchange or in any way emotional. It was just interminably, exhaustively logical and boring. Conrad fidgeted through two hours of it, seeing his chance for a rocket race dissolving. When at last the problem of balanced shift-populations for Santa Fe was worked out, it took him and the other traffic men only a few minutes to apply their tables and reschedule traffic to coordinate with the population changes.

Disgusted, Conrad walked over to the Tennis Club and had lunch.

There were still two hours of his rest day left when Conrad Manz realized that Bill Walden was again forcing an early shift. Conrad was in the middle of a volley-tennis game and he didn't like having the shift forced so soon. People generally shifted at their appointed regular hour every five days, and a hyperalter was not supposed to use his power to force shift. It was such an unthinkable thing nowadays that there was occasional talk of abolishing the terms hyperalter and hypoalter because they were somewhat disparaging to the hypoalter, and really designated only the antisocial power of the hyperalter to force the shift.

Bill Walden had been cheating two to four hours on Conrad every shift for several periods back. Conrad could have reported it to the Medicorps, but he himself was guilty of a constant misdemeanor about which Bill had not yet complained. Unlike the sedentary Walden, Conrad Manz enjoyed exercise. He overindulged in violent sports and put off sleep, letting Bill Walden make up the fatigue on his shift. That was undoubtedly why the poor old sucker had started cheating a few hours on Conrad's rest day.

Conrad laughed to himself, remembering the time Bill Walden had registered a long list of sports which he wished Conrad to be restrained from—rocket racing, deepsea exploration, jet-skiing. It had only given Conrad some ideas he hadn't had before. The Medicorps had refused to enforce the list on the basis that danger and violent exercise were a necessary outlet for Conrad's constitution. Then poor old Bill had written Conrad a note threatening to sue him for any injury resulting from such sports. As if he had a change against the Medicorps ruling!

Conrad knew it was no use trying to finish the volley-tennis game. He lost interest and

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couldn't concentrate on what he was doing when Bill started forcing the shift. Conrad shot the ball back at his opponent in a blistering curve impossible to intercept.

'So long," he yelled at the man. "I've got some things to do before my shift ends."

He lounged into the locker rooms and showered, put his clothes and belongings, including his pharmacase, in a shipping carton, addressed them to his own home and dropped them in the mail chute.

He stepped with languid nakedness across the hall, pressed his identifying wristband to a lock-face and dialed his clothing sizes.

In this way he procured a neatly wrapped, clean shifting costume from the slot. He put it on without bothering to return to his shower room.

He shouted a loud good-bye to no one in particular among the several men and women in the baths and stepped out onto the street.

Conrad felt too good even to be sorry that his shift was over. After all, nothing happened except you came to, five days later, on your next shift. The important thing was the rest day. He had always said the last day of the shift should be a work day; then you would be glad it was over. He guessed the idea was to rest the body before another personality took over. Well, poor old Bill Walden never got a rested body. He probably slept off the first twelve hours.

Walking unhurriedly through the street crowds, Conrad entered a public shifting station and found an empty room. As he started to open the door, a girl came out of the adjoining booth and Conrad hastily averted his glance. She was still rearranging her hair. There were so many rude people nowadays who didn't seem to care at all about the etiquette of shifting, women particularly. They were always redoing their hair or makeup where a person couldn't help seeing them.

Conrad pressed his identifying wristband to the lock and entered the booth he had picked. The act automatically sent the time and his shift number to Medicorps Headquarters.

Once inside the shifting room, Conrad went to the lavatory and turned on the faucet of makeup solvent. In spite of losing two hours of his rest day, he decided to be decent to old Bill, though he was half tempted to leave his makeup on. It was a pretty foul joke, of course, especially on a humorless fellow like poor Walden.

Conrad creamed his face thoroughly and then washed in water

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and used the automatic dryer. He looked at his strong-lined features in the mirror. They displayed a less distinct expression of his own personality with the makeup gone.

He turned away from the mirror and it was only then that he remembered he hadn't spoken to his wife before shifting. Well, he couldn't decently call up and let her see him without makeup.

He stepped across to the visiophone and set the machine to deliver his spoken message in type: "Hello, Clara. Sorry I forgot to call you before. Bill Walden is forcing me to shift early again. I hope you're not still upset about that business this morning. Be a good girl and smile at me on the next shift. I love you. Conrad."

FOR a moment, when the shift came, the body of Conrad Manz stood moronically uninhabited. Then, rapidly, out of the gyri of its brain, the personality of Bill Walden emerged, replacing the slackly powerful attitude of Conrad by the slightly prim preciseness of Bill's bearing.

The face, just now relaxed with readiness for action, was abruptly pulled into an intellectualized mask of tension by habitual patterns of conflict in the muscles. There were also acute momentary signs of clash between the vegetative nervous activity characteristic of Bill Walden and the internal homeostasis Conrad Manz had left behind him. The face paled as hypersensitive vascular beds closed down under new vegetative volleys.

Bill Walden grasped sight and sound, and the sharp odor of makeup solvent stung his nostrils. He was conscious of only one clamoring, terrifying thought: *They will catch us. It cannot go on much longer without Helen guessing about Clara. She is already angry about Clara delaying the shift, and if she learns from Mary that I am cheating on Conrad's shift . . . Any time now, perhaps this time, when the shift is over, I will be looking into the face of a medicop who is pulling a needle from my arm, and then it'll all be over.*

So far, at least, there was no medicop. Still feeling unreal but anxious not to lose precious moments, Bill took an individualized kit from the wall dispenser and made himself up. He was sparing and subtle in his use of the makeup, unlike the horrible makeup jobs Conrad Manz occasionally left on. Bill rearranged his hair. Conrad always wore it too short for his taste, but you couldn't complain about everything.

Bill sat in a chair to await some of the slower aspects of the shift.

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He knew that an hour after he left the booth, his basal metabolic rate would be ten points higher. His blood sugar would go down steadily. In the next five days he would lose six to eight pounds, which Conrad later would promptly regain.

Just as Bill was about to leave the booth, he remembered to pick up a news summary. He put his wristband to the switch on the telephoto and a freshly printed summary of the last five days in the world fell into the rack. His wristband, of course, called forth one edited for hyperalters on the D-shift.

It did not mention by name any hypoalter on the D-shift. Should one of them have done something that it was necessary for Bill or other D-shift hyperalters to know about, it would appear in news summaries called forth by their wristbands—but told in such fashion that the personality involved seemed namelessly incidental, while names and pictures of hyperalters and hypoalters on any of the other four shifts naturally were freely used. The purpose was to keep Conrad Manz and all other hypoalters on the D-shift, one-tenth of the total population, non-existent as far as their hyperalters were concerned. This convention made it necessary for photoprint summaries to be on light-sensitive paper that blackened illegibly before six hours were up, so that a man might never stumble on news about his hypoalter.

Bill did not even glance at the news summary. He had picked it up only for appearances. The summaries were essential if you were going to start where you left off on your last shift and have any knowledge of the five intervening days. A man just didn't walk out of a shifting room without one. It was failure to do little things like that that would start them wondering about him.

Bill opened the door of the booth by applying his wristband to the lock and stepped out into the street.

Late afternoon crowds pressed about him. Across the boulevard, a helicopter landing swarmed with clouds of rising commuters. Bill had some trouble figuring out the part of the city Conrad had left him in and walked two blocks before he understood where he was. Then he got into an idle two-place cab, started the motor with his wristband and hurried the little three-wheeler recklessly through the traffic. Clara was probably already waiting and he first had to go home and get dressed.

The thought of Clara waiting for him in the park near her home was a sharp reminder of his strange situation. He was in a

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left you with shame, and a fear that the other fellow would tell people you seemed to have a pathological interest in your alter and must need a change in your prescription.

But the most flagrant abuser of such morbid little exchanges would have been horrified to learn that right here, in the middle of the daylight traffic, was a man who was using his antisocial shifting power to meet in secret the wife of his own hypoalter!

Bill did not have to wonder what the Medicorps would think. Relations between hyperalters world that was literally not supposed to exist for him, for it was the world of his own hypoalter, Conrad Manz.

Undoubtedly, there were people in the traffic up ahead who knew both him and Conrad, people from the other shifts who never mentioned the one to the other except in those guarded, snickering little confidences they couldn't resist telling and you couldn't resist listening to. After all, the most important person in the world was your alter. If he got sick, injured or killed, so would you.

Thus, in moments of intimacy or joviality, an undercover exchange went on . . . *I'll tell you about your hyperalter if you'll tell me about my hypoalter.* It was orthodox bad manners that and hypoalters of opposite sex were punishable — drastically punishable.

WHEN he arrived at the apartment, Bill remembered to order a dinner for his daughter Mary. His order, dialed from the day's menu, was delivered to the apartment pneumatically and he set it out over electric warmers. He wanted to write a note to the child, but he started two and threw both in the basket. He couldn't think of anything to say to her.

Staring at the lonely table he was leaving for Mary, Bill felt his guilt overwhelming him. He could stop the behavior which led to the guilt by taking his drugs as prescribed. They would return him immediately to the sane and ordered conformity of the world. He would no longer have to carry the fear that the Medicorps would discover he was not taking his drugs. He would no longer neglect his appointed child. He would no longer endanger the very life of Conrad's wife Clara and, of course, his own.

When you took your drugs as prescribed, it was impossible to experience such ancient and primitive emotions as guilt. Even should you miscalculate and do something wrong, the drugs would not allow any such emo-

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tional reaction. To be free to experience his guilt over the lonely child who needed him was, for these reasons, a precious thing to Bill. In all the world, this night, he was undoubtedly the only man who could and did feel one of the ancient emotions. People felt shame, not guilt; conceit, not pride; pleasure, not desire. Now that he had stopped taking his dugs as prescribed, Bill realized that the drugs allowed only an impoverished segment of a vivid emotional spectrum.

But however exciting it was to live them, the ancient emotions did not seem to act as deterrents to bad behavior. Bill's sense of guilt did not keep him from continuing to neglect Mary. His fear of being caught did not restrain him from breaking every rule of inter-alter law and loving Clara, his own hypoalter's wife.

BILL got dressed as rapidly as possible. He tossed the discarded shifting costume into the return chute. He retouched his makeup, trying to eliminate some of the heavy, inexpressive planes of muscularity which were more typical of Conrad than of himself.

The act reminded him of the shame which his wife Helen had felt when she learned, a few years ago, that her own hypoalter, Clara, and his hypoalter, Conrad, had obtained from the Medicorps a special release to marry. Such rare marriages in which the same bodies lived together on both halves of a shift were something to snicker about. They verged on the antisocial, but could be arranged if the batteries of Medicorps tests could be satisfied.

Perhaps it had been the very intensity of Helen's shame on learning of this marriage, the nauseous display of conformity so typical of his wife, that had first given Bill the idea of seeking out Clara, who had dared convention to make such a peculiar marriage. Over the years, Helen had continued blaming all their troubles on the fact that both egos of himself were living with, and intimate with, both egos of herself.

So Bill had started cutting down on his drugs, the curiosity having become an obsession. What was this other part of Helen like, this Clara who was unconventional enough to want to marry only Bill's own hypoalter, in spite of almost certain public shame?

He had first seen Clara's face when it formed on a visiophone, the first time he had forced Conrad to shift prematurely. It was softer than Helen's. The delicate contours were less purposefully set, gayer.

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"Clara Manz?" Bill had sat there staring at the visiophone for several seconds, unable to continue. His great fear that she would immediately report him must have been naked on his face.

He had watched an impish suspicion grow in the tender curve of her lips and her oblique glance from the visiophone. She did not speak.

"Mrs. Manz," he finally said, "I would like to meet you in the park across from your home."

To this awkward opening he owed the first time he had heard Clara laugh. Her warm, clear laughter, teasing him, tumbled forth like a cloud of gay butterflies.

"Are you afraid to see me here at home because my husband might *walk in on us?*"

Bill had been put completely at ease by this bantering indication that Clara knew who he was and welcomed him as an intriguing diversion. Quite literally, the one person who could not *walk in on them,* as the ancients thought of it, was his own hypoalter, Conrad Manz.

BILL finished retouching his makeup and hurried to leave the apartment. But this time, as he passed the table where Mary's dinner was set out, he decided to write a few words to the child, no matter how empty they sounded to himself. The note he left explained that he had some early work to do at the microfilm library where he worked.

Just as Bill was leaving the apartment, the visiophone buzzed. In his hurry Bill flipped the switch before he thought. Too late, his hand froze and the implications of this call, an hour before anyone would normally be home, shot a shaft of terror through him.

But it was not the image of a medicop that formed on the screen. The woman introduced herself as Mrs. Harris, one of Mary's teachers.

It was strange that she should have thought he might be home. The shift for children was half a day earlier than that for adults, so the parents could have half their rest day free. This afternoon would be for Mary the first classes of her shift, but the teacher must have guessed something was wrong with the shifting schedules in Mary's family. Or had the child told her?

Mrs. Harris explained rather dramatically that Mary was being neglected. What could he say to her? That he was a criminal breaking drug regulations in the most flagrant manner? That nothing, not even the child appointed to him, meant more to him than his wife's own hypoalter? Bill finally ended the hope-

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less and possibly dangerous conversation by turning off the receiver and leaving the apartment.

Bill realized that now, for both him and Clara, the greatest joy had been those first few times together. The enormous threat of a Medicorps retaliation took the pleasure from their contact and they came together desperately because, having tasted this fantastic non-conformity and the new undrugged intimacy, there was no other way for them. Even now as he drove through the traffic toward where she would be waiting, he was not so much concerned with meeting Clara in their fear-poisoned present as with the vivid, aching remembrance of what those meetings once had really been like.

He recalled an evening they had spent lying on the summer lawn of the park, looking out at the haze-dimmed stars. It had been shortly after Clara joined him in cutting down on the drugs, and the clear memory of their quiet laughter so captured his mind now that Bill almost tangled his car in the traffic.

In memory he kissed her again and, as it had then, the newly cut grass mixed with the exciting fragrance of her skin. After the kiss they continued a mock discussion of the ancient word "sin." Bill pretended to be trying to explain the meaning of the word to her, sometimes with definitions that kept them laughing and sometimes with demonstrational kisses that stopped their laughter.

He could remember Clara's face turned to him in the evening light with an outrageous parody of interest. He could hear himself saying, "You see, the ancients would say we are not *sinning* because they would disagree with the medicops that you and Helen are two completely different people, or that Conrad and I are not the same person."

Clara kissed him with an air of tentative experimentation. "Mmm, no. I can't say I care for that interpretation."

"You'd rather be sinning?"

"Definitely."

"Well, if the ancients did agree with the medicops that we are distinct from our alters, Helen and Conrad, then they would say we are sinning—but not for the same reasons the Medicorps would give."

"That," asserted Clara, "is where I get lost. If this sinning business is going to be worth anything at all, it has to be something you can identify."

Bill cut his car out of the main stream of traffic and toward the park, without interrupting his memory.

"Well, darling, I don't want to confuse you, but the medicops

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would say we are sinning only because you are my wife's hypoalter, and I am your husband's hyperalter—in other words, for the very reason the ancients would say we are *not* sinning. Furthermore, if either of us were with anyone else, the medicops would think it was perfectly all right, and so would Conrad and Helen. Provided, of course, I took a hyperalter and you took a hypoalter only."

"Of course," Clara said, and Bill hurried over the gloomy fact.

"The ancients, on the other hand, would say we are sinning because we are making love to someone we are not married to."

"But what's the matter with that? Everybody does it."

"The ancient Moderns didn't. Or, that is, they often did, but..."

Clara brought her full lips hungrily to his. "Darling, I think the ancient Moderns had the right idea, though I don't see how they ever arrived at it."

Bill grinned. "It was just an invention of theirs, along with the wheel and atomic energy."

That evening was long gone by as Bill stopped the little taxi beside the park and left it there for the next user. He walked across the lawns toward the statue where he and Clara always met. The very thought of entering one's own hypoalter's house was so unnerving that Bill brought himself to do it only by first meeting Clara near the statue. As he walked between the trees, Bill could not again capture the spirit of that evening he had been remembering. The Medicorps was too close. It was impossible to laugh that way now.

Bill arrived at the statue, but Clara was not there. He waited impatiently while a livid sunset coagulated between the branches of the great trees. Clara should have been there first. It was easier for her, because she was leaving her shift, and without doing it prematurely.

The park was like a quiet backwater in the eddying rush of the evening city. Bill felt conspicuous and vulnerable in the gloaming light. Above all, he felt a new loneliness, and he knew that now Clara felt it, too. They needed each other as each had been, before fear had bleached their feeling to white bones of desperation.

They were not taking their drugs as prescribed, and for that they would be horribly punished. That was the only unforgivable *sin* in their world. By committing it, he and Clara had found out what life could be, in the same act that would surely take life from them. Their powerful emotions they had found in abundance simply by refusing to take the drugs, and by being together

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briefly each fifth day in a dangerous breach of all convention. The closer their discovery and the greater their terror, the more desperately they needed even their terror, and the more impossible became the delight of their first meetings.

Telegraphing bright beads of sound, a night bird skimmed the sunset lawns to the looming statue and skewed around its monolithic base. The bird's piping doubled and then choked off as it veered frantically from Bill. After a while, far off through the park, it released a fading protest of song.

Above Bill, the towering statue of the great Alfred Morris blackened against the sunset. The hollowed granite eyes bore down on him out of an undecipherable dark . . . the ancient, implacable face of the Medicorps. As if to pronounce a sentence on his present crimes by a magical disclosure of the weight of centuries, a pool of sulfurous light and leaf shadows danced on the painted plaque at the base of the statue.

On this spot in the Gregorian year 1996, Alfred Morris announced to an assembly of war survivors the hypothalamic block. His stirring words were; "This new drug selectively halts at the thalamic brain the upward flow of unconscious stimuli and the downward flow of unconscious motivations. It acts as a screen between the cerebrum and the psychosomatic discharge system. Using hypothalamic block, we will not act emotively, we will initiate acts only from the logical demands of situations."

This announcement and the subsequent wholehearted action of the war-weary people made the taking of hypothalamic block obligatory. This put an end to the powerful play of unconscious mind in the public and private affairs of the ancient world. It ended the great paranoid wars and saved mankind.

In the strange evening light, the letters seemed alive, a centuries-old condemnation of any who might try to go back to the ancient pre-pharmacy days. Of course, it was not really possible to go back. Without drugs, everybody and all society would fall apart.

The ancients had first learned to keep endocrine deviates such as the diabetic alive with drugs. Later they learned with other drugs to "cure" the far more prevalent disease, schizophrenia, that was jamming their hospitals. The big change came when the ancients used these same drugs on everyone to control the private and public irrationality of their time and stop the wars.

In this new, drugged world, the schizophrene thrived better than any, and the world became patterned on him. But, just as the diabetic was still diabetic, the schizophrene was still himself, plus the drugs. Meanwhile, every-

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one had forgotten what it was the drugs did to you—that the emotions experienced were blurred emotions, that insight was at an isolated level of rationality because the drugs kept true feelings from ever emerging.

How inconceivable it would be to Helen and the other people of his world to live on as little drug as possible . . . to experience the conflicting emotions, the interplay of passion and logic that almost tore you apart! Sober, the ancients called it, and they lived that way most of the time, with only the occasional crude and clublike effects of alcohol or narcotics to relieve their chronic anxiety.

By taking as little hypothalamic block as possible, he and Clara were able to desire their fantastic attachment, to delight in an absolutely illogical situation unheard of in their society. But the society would judge their refusal to take hypothalamic block in only one sense. The weight of this judgment stood before him in the smoldering words, *"It ended the great paranoid wars and saved mankind."*

When Clara did appear, she was searching myopically in the wrong vicinity of the statue. He did not call to her at once; letting the sight of her smooth out the tensions in him, convert all the conflicts into this one intense longing to be with her.

Her halting search for him was deeply touching, like that of a tragic little puppet in a darkening dumbshow. He saw suddenly how like puppets the two of them were. They were moved by the strengthening wires of a new life of feeling to batter clumsily at an implacable stage setting that would finally leave them as bits of wood and paper.

Then suddenly in his arms Clara was at the same time hungrily moving and tense with fear of discovery. Little sounds of love and fear choked each other in her throat. Her blonde head pressed tightly into his shoulder and she clung to him with desperation.

She said, "Conrad was disturbed by my tension this morning and made me take a sleeping compound. I've just awakened."

They walked to her home in silence and even in the darkened apartment they used only the primitive monosyllables of apprehensive need. Beyond these mere sounds of compassion, they had long ago said all that could be said.

Because Bill was the hyperalter, he had no fear that Conrad could force a shift on him. When later they lay in darkness, he allowed himself to drift into a brief slumber. Without the sleeping compound, distorted events

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came and went without reason. Dreaming, the ancients had called it. It was one of the most frightening things that had begun to happen when he first cut down on the drugs. Now, in the few seconds that he dozed, a thousand fragments of incidental knowledge, historical reading and emotional need melded and, in a strange contrast to their present tranquility, he was dreaming a frightful moment in the 20th century. *These are the great paranoid wars,* he thought. And it was so because he had thought it.

He searched frantically through the glove compartment of an ancient automobile. "Wait," he pleaded. "I tell you we have sulfonamide-14. We've been taking it regularly as directed. We took a double dose back in Paterson because there were soft-bombs all through that part of Jersey and we didn't know what would be declared Plague Area next."

Now Bill threw things out of his satchel onto the floor and seat of the car, fumbling deeper by the flashlight Clara held. His heart beat thickly with terror. Then he remembered his pharmacase. Oh, why hadn't they remembered sooner about their pharmacases. Bill tore at the belt about his waist.

The Medicorps captain stepped back from the door of their car. He jerked his head at the dark form of the corporal standing in the roadway. "Shoot them. Run the car off the embankment before you burn it."

Bill screamed metallically through the speaker of his radiation mask. "Wait. I've found it." He thrust the pharmacase out the door of the car. "This is a pharmacase," he explained. "We keep our drugs in one of these and it's belted to our waist so we are never without them."

The captain of the Medicorps came back. He inspected the pharmacase and the drugs and returned it. "From now on, keep your drugs handy. Take them without fail according to radio instructions. Do you understand?"

Clara's head pressed heavily against Bill's shoulder, and he could hear the tinny sound of her sobbing through the speaker of her mask.

The captain stepped into the road again. "We'll have to burn your car. You passed through a Plague Area and it can't be sterilized on this route. About a mile up this road you'll come to a sterilization unit. Stop and have your person and belongings rayed. After that, keep walking, but stick to the road. You'll be shot if you're caught off it."

The road was crowded with fleeing people. Their way was lighted by piles of cadavers

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writhing in gasoline flames. The Medicorps was everywhere. Those who stumbled, those who coughed, the delirious and their helping partners . . . these were taken to the side of the road, shot and burned. And there was bombing again to the south.

Bill stopped in the middle of the road and looked back. Clara clung to him.

"There is a plague here we haven't any drug for," he said, and realized he was crying. "We are all mad."

Clara was crying too. "Darling, what have you done? Where are the drugs?"

The water of the Hudson hung as it had in the late afternoon, ice crystals in the stratosphere. The high, high sheet flashed and glowed in the new bombing to the south, where multicolored pillars of flame boiled into the sky. But the muffled crash of the distant bombing was suddenly the steady click of the urgent signal on a bedside visiophone, and Bill was abruptly awake.

Clara was throwing on her robe and moving toward the machine on terror-rigid limbs. With a scrambling motion, Bill got out of the possible view of the machine and crouched at the end of the room.

Distinctly, he could hear the machine say, "Clara Manz?"

"Yes." Clara's voice was a thin treble that could have been a shriek had it continued.

"This is Medicorps Headquarters. A routine check discloses you have delayed your shift two hours. To maintain the statistical record of deviations, please give us a full explanation."

"I . . ." Clara had to swallow before she could talk. "I must have taken too much sleeping compound."

"Mrs. Manz, our records indicate that you have been delaying your shift consistently for several periods now. We made a check of this as a routine follow up on any such deviation, but the discovery is quite serious." There was a harsh silence, a silence that demanded a logical answer. But how could there be a logical answer?

"My hyperalter hasn't complained and I—well, I have just let a bad habit develop. I'll see that it—doesn't happen again."

The machine voiced several platitudes about the responsibilities of one personality to another and the duty of all to society before Clara was able to shut it off.

Both of them sat as they were for a long, long time while the tide of terror subsided. When at last they looked at each other across the dim and silent room, both of them knew there could be at least one more time together before they were caught.

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FIVE days later, on the last day of her shift, Mary Walden wrote the address of her appointed father's hypoalter, Conrad Manz, with an indelible pencil on the skin just below her armpit.

During the morning, her father and mother had spoiled the family rest day by quarreling. It was about Helen's hypoalter delaying so many shifts. Bill did not think it very important, but her mother was angry and threatened to complain to the Medicorps.

The lunch was eaten in silence, except that at one point Bill said, "It seems to me Conrad and Clara Manz are guilty of a peculiar marriage, not us. Yet they seem perfectly happy with it and you're the one who is made unhappy. The woman has probably just developed a habit of taking too much sleeping compound for her rest day naps. Why don't you drop her a note?"

Helen made only one remark. It was said through her teeth and very softly. "Bill, I would just as soon the child did not realize her relationship to this sordid situation."

Mary cringed over the way Helen disregarded her hearing, the possibility that she might be capable of understanding, or her feelings about being shut out of their mutual world.

After the lunch Mary cleared the table, throwing the remains of the meal and the plastiplates into the flash trash disposer. Her father had retreated to the library room and Helen was getting ready to attend a Citizen's Meeting. Mary heard her mother enter the room to say good-bye while she was wiping the dining table. She knew that Helen was standing, well-dressed and a little impatient, just behind her, but she pretended she did not know.

"Darling, I'm leaving now for the Citizen's Meeting."

"Oh . . . yes."

"Be a good girl and don't be late for your shift. You only have an hour now." Helen's patrician face smiled.

"I won't be late."

"Don't pay any attention to the things Bill and I discussed this morning, will you?"

"No."

And she was gone. She did not say good-bye to Bill.

Mary was very conscious of her father in the house. He continued to sit in the library. She walked by the door and she could see him sitting in a chair, staring at the floor. Mary stood in the sun room for a long while. If he had risen from his chair, if he had rustled a page, if he had sighed, she would have heard him.

It grew closer and closer to the time she would have to leave if Susan Shorrs was to catch the

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first school hours of her shift. Why did children have to shift half a day before adults?

Finally, Mary thought of something to say. She could let him know she was old enough to understand what the quarrel had been about if only it were explained to her.

Mary went into the library and hesitantly sat on the edge of a couch near him. He did not look at her and his face seemed gray in the midday light. Then she knew that he was lonely, too. But a great feeling of tenderness for him went through her.

"Sometimes I think you and Clara Manz must be the only people in the world," she said abruptly, "who aren't so silly about shifting right on the dot. Why, I don't *care* if Susan Shorrs *is* an hour late for classes!"

Those first moments when he seized her in his arms, it seemed her heart would shake loose. It was as though she had uttered some magic formula, one that had abruptly opened the doors to his love. It was only after he had explained to her why he was always late on the first day of the family shift that she knew something was wrong. He *did* tell her, over and over, that he knew she was unhappy and that it was his fault. But he was at the same time soothing her, petting her, as if *he was afraid of her.*

He talked on and on. Gradually, Mary understood in his trembling body, in his perspiring palms, in his pleading eyes, that he was afraid of dying, that he was afraid *she* would kill him with the merest thing she said, with her very presence.

This was not painful to Mary, because, suddenly, something came with ponderous enormity to stand before her: *I would just as soon the child did not realize her relationship to this sordid situation.*

Her relationship. It was some kind of relationship to Conrad and Clara Manz, because those were the people they had been talking about.

The moment her father left the apartment, she went to his desk and took out the file of family records. After she found the address of Conrad Manz, the idea occurred to her to write it on her body. Mary was certain that Susan Shorrs never bathed and she thought this a clever idea. Sometime on Susan's rest day, five days from now, she would try to force the shift and go to see Conrad and Clara Manz. Her plan was simple in execution, but totally vague as to goal.

Mary was already late when she hurried to the children's section of a public shifting station. A Children's Transfer Bus was waiting, and Mary registered on

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it for Susan Shorrs to be taken to school. After that she found a shifting room and opened it with her wristband. She changed into a shifting costume and sent her own clothes and belongings home.

Children her age did not wear makeup, but Mary always stood at the mirror during the shift. She always tried as hard as she could to see what Susan Shorrs looked like. She giggled over a verse that was scrawled beside the mirror . . .

> Rouge your hair and comb your face;
> Many a third head is lost in this place.

. . . and then the shift came, doubly frightening because of what she knew she was going to do.

ESPECIALLY if you were a hyperalter like Mary, you were supposed to have some sense of the passage of time while you were out of shift. Of course, you did not know what was going on, but it was as though a more or less accurate chronometer kept running when you went out of shift. Apparently Mary's was highly inaccurate, because, to her horror, she found herself sitting bolt upright in one of Mrs. Harris's classes, not out on the playgrounds, where she had expected Susan Schorrs to be.

Mary was terrified, and the ugly school dress Susan had been wearing accented, by its strangeness, the seriousness of her premature shift. Children weren't supposed to show much difference from hyperalter to hypoalter, but when she raised her eyes, her fright grew. Children did change. She hardly recognized anyone in the room, though most of them must be the alters of her own classmates. Mrs. Harris was a B-shift and overlapped both Mary and Susan, but otherwise Mary recognized only Carl Blair's hypoalter because of his freckles.

Mary knew she had to get out of there or Mrs. Harris would eventually recognize her. If she left the room quietly, Mrs. Harris would not question her unless she recognized her. It was no use trying to guess how Susan would walk.

Mary stood and went toward the door, glad that it turned her back to Mrs. Harris. It seemed to her that she could feel the teacher's eyes stabbing through her back.

But she walked safely from the room. She dashed down the school corridor and out into the street. So great was her fear of what she was doing that her hypoalter's world actually seemed

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like a different one.

It was a long way for Mary to walk across town, and when she rang the bell, Conrad Manz was already home from work. He smiled at her and she loved him at once.

"Well, what do you want, young lady?" he asked.

Mary couldn't answer him. She just smiled back.

"What's your name, eh?"

Mary went right on smiling, but suddenly he blurred in front of her.

"Here, here! There's nothing to cry about. Come on in and let's see if we can help you. Clara! We have a visitor, a very sentimental visitor."

Mary let him put his big arm around her shoulder and draw her, crying, into the apartment. Then she saw Clara swimming before her, looking like her mother, but . . . no, not at all like her mother.

"Now, see here, chicken, what is it you've come for?" Conrad asked when her crying stopped.

Mary had to stare hard at the floor to be able to say it. "I want to live with you."

Clara was twisting and untwisting a handkerchief. "But, child, we have already had our first baby appointed to us. He'll be with us next shift, and after that I have to bear a baby for someone else to keep. We wouldn't be allowed to take care of you."

"I thought maybe I was your real child." Mary said it helplessly, knowing in advance what the answer would be.

"Darling," Clara soothed, "children don't live with their natural parents. It's neither practical nor civilized. I have had a child conceived and borne on my shift, and this baby is my exchange, so you see that you are much too old to be my conception. Whoever your natural parents may be, it is just something on record with the Medicorps Genetic Division and isn't important."

"But you're a special case," Mary pressed. "I thought because it was a special arrangement that you were my real parents." She looked up and she saw that Clara had turned white.

And now Conrad Manz was agitated, too. "What do you mean, we're a special case?" He was staring hard at her.

"Because . . ." And now for the first time Mary realized how special this case was, how sensitive they would be about it.

He grasped her by the shoulders and turned her so she faced his unblinking eyes. "I said, what do you mean, we're a special case? Clara, what in thirty heads does this kid mean?"

His grip hurt her and she began to cry again. She broke away.

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"You're the hypoalters of my appointed father and mother. I thought maybe when it was like that, I might be your real child . . . and you might want me. I don't want to be where I am. I want somebody . . ."

Clara was calm now, her sudden fear gone. "But, darling, if you're unhappy where you are, only the Medicorps can reappoint you. Besides, maybe your appointed parents are just having some personal problems right now. Maybe if you tried to understand them, you would see that they really love you."

Conrad's face showed that he did not understand. He spoke with a stiff, quiet voice and without taking his eyes from Mary. "What are you doing here? My own hyperalter's kid in my house, throwing it up to me that I'm married to his wife's hypoalter!"

They did not feel the earth move, as she fearfully did. They sat there, staring at her, as though they might sit forever while she backed away, out of the apartment, and ran into her collapsing world.

CONRAD Manz's rest day fell the day after Bill Walden's kid showed up at his apartment. It was ten days since that strait jacket of a conference on Santa Fe had lost him a chance to blast off a rocket racer. This time, on the practical knowledge that emergency business conferences were seldom called after lunch, Conrad had placed his reservation for a racer in the afternoon. The visit from Mary Walden had upset him every time he thought of it. Since it was his rest day, he had no intention of thinking about it and Conrad's scrupulously drugged mind was capable of just that.

So now, in the lavish coolness of the lounge at the Rocket Club, Conrad sipped his drink contentedly and made no contribution to the gloomy conversation going on around him.

"Look at it this way," the melancholy face of Alberts, a pilot from England, morosely emphasized his tone. "It takes about 10.000 economic units to jack a forty ton ship up to satellite level and snap it around the course six times. That's just practice for us. On the other hand, an intellectual fellow who spends his spare time at a microfilm library doesn't use up 1,000 units in a year. In fact, his spare time activity may turn up as units gained. The Economic Board doesn't argue that all pastime should be gainful. They just say rocket racing wastes more economic units than most pilots make on their work days. I tell you the day is almost here when they ban the rockets."

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"That's just it," another pilot put in. "There was a time when you could show that rocket races were necessary for better spaceship design. Design has gone way beyond that. From their point of view we just burn up units as fast as other people create them. And it's no use trying to argue for the television shows. The Board can prove people would rather see a jet-skiing meet at a cost of about one-hundredth that of a rocket race."

Conrad Manz grinned into his drink. He had been aware for several minutes that pert little Angela, Alberts' soft-eyed, husky-voiced wife, was trying to catch his eye. But stranded as she was in the buzzing traffic of rockets, she was trying to hail the wrong rescuer. He had about fifteen minutes till the ramp boys would have a ship ready for him. Much as he liked Angela, he wasn't going to miss that race.

Still, he let his grin broaden and, looking up at her, he lied maliciously by nodding. She interpreted this signal as he knew she would. Well, at least he would afford her a graceful exit from the boring conversation.

He got up and went over and took her hand. Her full lips parted a little and she kissed him on the mouth.

Conrad turned to Alberts and interrupted him. "Angela and I would like to spend a little time together. Do you mind?"

Alberts was annoyed at having his train of thought broken and rather snapped out the usual courtesy. "Of course not. I'm glad for both of you."

Conrad looked the group over with a bland stare. "Have you lads ever tried jet-skiing? There's more genuine excitement in ten minutes of it than an hour of rocket racing. Personally, I don't care if the Board does ban the rockets soon. I'll just hop out to the Rocky Mountains on rest days."

CONRAD knew perfectly well that if he had made this assertion before asking Alberts for his wife, the man would have found some excuse to have her remain. All the faces present displayed the *aficionado*'s disdain for one who has just demonstrated he doesn't *belong*. What the straitjacket did they think they were—some ancient order of noblemen?

Conrad took Angela's yielding arm and led her serenely away before Alberts could think of anything to detain her.

On the way out of the lounge, she stroked his arm with frank admiration. "I'm so glad you were agreeable. Honestly, Harold could talk rockets till I died."

Conrad bent and kissed her.

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"Angela, I'm sorry, but this isn't going to be what you think. I have a ship to take off in just a few minutes."

She flared and dug into his arm now. "Oh, Conrad Manz! You ... . you made me believe . . ."

He laughed and grabbed her wrists. "Now, now. I'm neglecting you to *fly* a rocket, not just to talk about them. I won't let you die."

At that she could not suppress her husky musical laugh. "I found that out the last time you and I were together. Clara and I had a drink the other day at the Citizen's Club. I don't often use dirty language, but I told Clara she must be keeping you in a *straitjacket* at home."

Conrad frowned, wishing she hadn't brought up the subject. It worried him off and on that something was wrong with Clara, something even worse than that awful *dreaming* business ten days ago. For several shifts now she had been cold, nor was it just a temporary lack of interest in himself, for she was also cold to the men of their acquaintance of whom she was usually quite fond. As for himself, he had had to depend on casual contacts such as Angela. Not that they weren't pleasant, but a man and wife were supposed to maintain a healthy love life between themselves, and it usually meant trouble with the Medicorps when this broke down.

Angela glanced at him. "I didn't think Clara laughed well at my remark. Is something wrong between you?"

"Oh, no," he declared hastily. "Clara is sometimes that way . . . doesn't catch a joke right off."

A page boy approached them where they stood in the rotunda and advised Conrad that his ship was ready.

"Honestly, Angela, I'll make it up, I promise."

"I know you will, darling. And at least I'm grateful you saved me from all those rocket jets in there." Angela raised her lips for a kiss and afterward, as she pushed him toward the door, her slightly vacant face smiled at him.

OUT on the ramp, Conrad found another pilot ready to take off. They made two wagers —first to reach the racing course, and winner in a six-lap heat around the six-hundred-mile hexagonal course.

They fired together and Conrad blasted his ship up on a thunderous column of flame that squeezed him into his seat. He was good at this and he knew he would win the lift to the course. On the course, though, if his opponent was any good at all, Conrad would probably lose because

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he enjoyed slamming the ship around the course in his wasteful, swashbuckling style much more than merely winning the heat.

Conrad kept his drive on till the last possible second and then shot out his nose jets. The ship shuddered up through another hundred miles and came to a lolling halt near the starting buoys. The other pilot gasped when Conrad shouted at him over the intership, "The winner by all thirty heads!"

It was generally assumed that a race up to the course consisted of cutting all jets when you had enough lift, and using the nose brakes only to correct any overshot. "What did you do, just keep your power on and flip the ship around?" The other racer coasted up to Conrad's level and steadied with a brief forward burst.

They got the automatic signal from the starting buoy and went for the first turn, nose and nose, about half a mile apart. Conrad lost 5000 yards on the first turn by shoving his power too hard against the starboard steering jets.

It made a pretty picture when a racer hammered its way around a turn that way with a fan of outside jets holding it in place. The other fellow made his turns cleanly, using mostly the driving jets for steering. But that didn't look like much to those who happened to flip on their television while this little heat was in progress. On every turn, Conrad lost a little in space, but not in the eye of the automatic televisor on the buoy marking the turn. As usual, he cut closer to the buoys than regulations allowed, to give the folks a show.

Without the slightest regret, Conrad lost the heat by a full two sides of the hexagon. He congratulated his opponent and watched the fellow let his ship down carefully toward earth on its tail jets. For a while Conrad lolled his ship around near the starting buoy and its probably watching eye, flipping through a series of complicated maneuvers with the steering jets.

Conrad did not like the grim countenance of outer space. The lifeless, gemlike blaze of cloud upon cloud of stars in the perspectiveless black repelled him. He liked rocket racing only because of the neat timing necessary, and possibly because the knowledge that he indulged in it scared poor old Bill Walden half to death.

Today the bleak aspect of the Galaxy harried his mind back upon its own problems. A particularly nasty association of Clara with Bill Walden and his sniveling kid kept dogging Conrad's mind and, as soon as stunt-

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ing had exhausted his excess of fuel, he turned the ship to earth and sent it in with a short, spectacular burst.

Now that he stopped to consider it, Clara's strange behavior had begun at about the same time that Bill Walden started cheating on the shifts. That kid Mary must have known something was going on, or she would not have done such a disgusting thing as to come to their apartment.

Conrad had let the rocket fall nose-down, until now it was screaming into the upper ionosphere. With no time to spare, he swiveled the ship on its guiding jets and opened the drive blast at the up-rushing earth. He had just completed this wrenching maneuver when two appalling things happened together.

Conrad suddenly knew, whether as a momentary leak from Bill's mind to his, or as a rapid calculation of his own, that Bill Walden and Clara shared a secret. At the same moment, something tore through his mind like fingers of chill wind. With seven gravities mashing him into the bucket-seat, he grunted curses past thin-stretched lips.

"Great blue psychiatrists! What in thirty straitjackets is that three-headed fool trying to do, kill us both?"

Conrad just managed to raise his leaden hand and set the plummeting racer for automatic pilot before Bill Walden forced him out of the shift. In his last moment of consciousness, and in the shock of his overwhelming shame, Conrad felt the bitter irony that he could not cut the power and kill Bill Walden.

WHEN Bill Walden became conscious of the thunderous clamor of the braking ship and the awful weight of deceleration into which he had shifted, the core of him froze. He was so terrified that he could not have thought of reshifting even had there been time.

His head rolled on the pad in spite of its weight, and he saw the earth coming at him like a monstrous swatter aimed at a fly. Between his fright and the inhuman gravity, he lost consciousness without ever seeing on the control panel the red warning that saved him: *Automatic Pilot.*

The ship settled itself on the ramp in a mushroom of fire. Bill regained awareness several seconds later. He was too shaken to do anything but sit there for a long time.

When at last he felt capable of moving, he struggled with the door till he found how to open it, and climbed down to the still-hot ramp he had landed on. It was at least a mile to the Rocket Club across the barren flat of the

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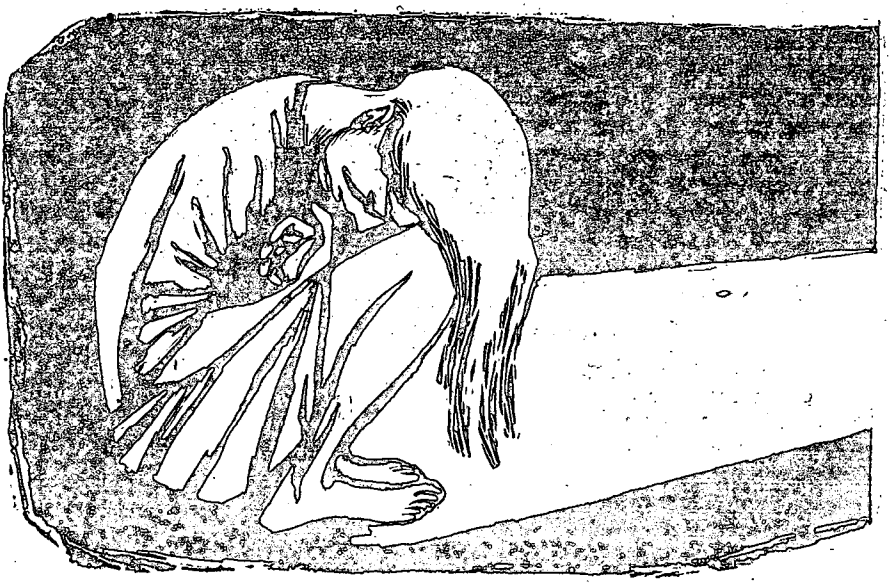

field, and he set out on foot. Shortly, however, a truck came speeding across to him.

The driver leaned out. "Hey, Conrad, what's the matter? Why didn't you pull the ship over to the hangars?"

With Conrad's makeup on, Bill felt he could probably get by. "Controls aren't working," he offered noncommittally.

At the club, a place he had never been to before in his life, Bill found an unused helicopter and started it with his wristband. He flew the machine into town to the landing station nearest his home.

He was doomed, he knew. Conrad certainly would report him for this. He had not intended to force the shift so early or so violently. Perhaps he had not intended to force it at all this time. But there was something in him more powerful than himself . . . a need to break the shift and be with Clara that now acted almost independently of him and certainly without regard for his safety.

Bill flew his craft carefully through the city traffic, working his way between the widely spaced towers with the uncertain hand of one to whom machines

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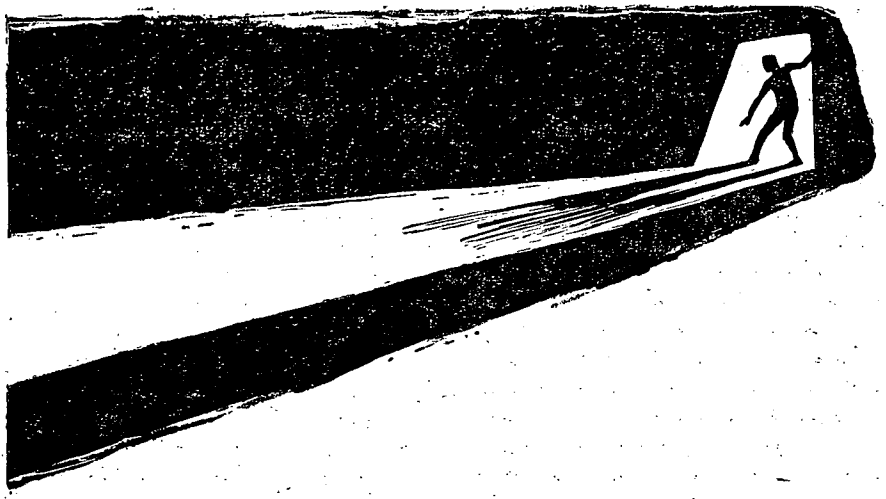

are not an extension of the body. He put the helicopter down at the landing station with some difficulty.

Clara would not be expecting him so early. From his apartment, as soon as he had changed makeup, he visiophoned her. It was strange how long and how carefully they needed to look at each other and how few words they could say.

Afterward, he seemed calmer and went about getting ready with more efficiency. But when he found himself addressing the package of Conrad's clothes to his home, he chuckled bitterly.

It was when he went back to drop the package in the mail chute that he noticed the storage room door ajar. He disposed of the package and went over to the door. Then he stood still, listening. He had to stop his own breathing to hear clearly.

Bill tightened himself and opened the door. He flipped on the light and saw Mary. The child sat on the floor in the corner with her knees drawn up against her chest. Between the knees and the chest, the frail wrists were crossed, the hands closed limply like — like those of a fetus. The forehead rested

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on the knees so that, should the closed eyes stray open, they would be looking at the placid hands.

The sickening sight of the child squeezed down on his heart till the color drained from his face. He went forward and knelt before her. His dry throat hammered with the words, *what have I done to you,* but he could not speak. The question of how long she might have been here, he could not bear to think.

He put out his hand, but he did not touch her. A shudder of revulsion shook him and he scrambled to his feet. He hurried back into the apartment with only one thought. He must get someone to help her. Only the Medicorps could take care of a situation like this.

As he stood at the visiophone, he knew that this involuntary act of panic had betrayed all that he had ever thought and done. He had to call the Medicorps. He could not face the result of his own behavior without them. Like a ghostly after-image, he saw Clara's face on the screen. She was lost, cut off, with only himself to depend on.

A part of him, a place where there were no voices and a great tragedy, had been abruptly shut off. He stood stupidly confused and disturbed about something he couldn't recall. The emotion in his body suddenly had no referent. He stood like a badly frightened animal while his heart slowed and blood seeped again into whitened parenchymas, while tides of epinephrine burned lower.

Remembering he must hurry, Bill left the apartment. It was an apartment with its storage room door closed, an apartment without a storage room.

From the moment that he walked in and took Clara in his arms, he was not worried about being caught. He felt only the great need for her. There seemed only one difference from the first time and it was a good difference, because now Clara was so tense and apprehensive. He felt a new tenderness for her, as one might feel for a child. It seemed to him that there was no end to the well of gentleness and compassion that was suddenly in him. He was mystified by the depth of this feeling. He kissed her again and again and petted her as one might a disturbed child.

Clara said, "Oh, Bill, we're doing wrong! Mary was here yesterday!"

Whoever she meant, it had no meaning for him. He said, "It's all right. You mustn't worry."

"She needs you, Bill, and I take you away from her."

Whatever it was she was talking about was utterly unimportant beside the fact that she was

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not happy herself. He soothed her. "Darling, you mustn't worry about it. Let's be happy the way we used to be."

He led her to a couch and they sat together, her head resting on his shoulder.

"Conrad is worried about me. He knows something is wrong. Oh, Bill, if he knew, he'd demand the worst penalty for you."

Bill felt the stone of fear come back in his chest. He thought, too, of Helen, of how intense her shame would be. Medicorps action would be machinelike, logical as a set of equation; they were very likely to take more drastic steps where the complaints would be so strong and no request for leniency forthcoming. Conrad knew now, of course. Bill had felt his hate.

It was nearing the end. Death would come to Bill with electronic fingers. A ghostly probing in his mind and suddenly . . .

Clara's great unhappiness and the way she turned her head into his shoulder to cry forced him to calm the rising panic in himself, and again to caress the fear from her.

Even later, when they lay where the moonlight thrust into the room an impalpable shaft of alabaster, he loved her only as a succor. Carefully, slowly, smoothing out her mind, drawing it away from all the other things, drawing it down into this one thing. Gathering all her mind into her senses and holding it there. Then quickly taking it away from her in a moaning spasm so that now she was murmuring, murmuring, palely drifting. Sleeping like a loved child.

For a long, long time he watched the white moon cut its arc across their window. He listened with a deep pleasure to her evenly breathing sleep. But slowly he realized that her breath had changed, that the body so close to his was tensing. His heart gave a great bound and tiny moths of horror fluttered along his back. He raised himself and saw that the eyes were open in the silver light. Even through the makeup he saw that they were Helen's eyes.

He did the only thing left for him. He shifted. But in that terrible instant he understood something he had not anticipated. In Helen's eyes there was not only intense shame over shifting into her hypoalter's home; there was not only the disgust with himself for breaking communication codes. He saw that, as a woman of the 20th Century might have felt, Helen hated Clara as a sexual rival. She hated Clara doubly because he had turned not to some other woman, but to the other part of herself whom she could never know.

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As he shifted, Bill knew that the next light he saw would be on the adamant face of the Medicorps.

MAJOR Paul Grey, with two other Medicorps officers, entered the Walden apartment about two hours after Bill left it to meet Clara. Major Grey was angry with himself. Important information on a case of communication-breaks and drug-refusal could be learned by letting it run its course under observation. But he had not intended Conrad Manz's life to be endangered, and certainly he would not have taken the slightest chance on what they found in the Walden apartment if he had expected it this early.

Major Grey blamed himself for what had happened to Mary Walden. He should have had the machines watching Susan and Mary at the same time that they were relaying all wristband data for Bill and Conrad and for Helen and Clara to his office.

He had not done this because it was Susan's shift and he had not expected Mary to break it. Now he knew that Helen and Bill Walden had been quarreling over the fact that Clara was cheating on Helen's shifts, and their conversations had directed the unhappy child's attention to the Manz couple. She had broken shift to meet them . . . looking for a loving father, of course.

Still—things would not have turned out so badly if Captain Thiel, Mary's school officer, had not attributed Susan Shorrs' disappearance only to poor drug acclimatization. Captain Thiel had naturally known that Major Grey was in town to prosecute Bill Walden, because the major had called on him to discuss the case. Yet it had not occurred to him, until 18 hours after Susan's disappearance, that Mary might have forced the shift for some reason associated with her aberrant father.

By the time the captain advised him, Major Grey already knew that Bill had forced the shift on Conrad under desperate circumstances and he had decided to close in. He fully expected to find the father and daughter at the apartment, and now . . . it sickened him to see the child's demented condition and realize that Bill had left her there.

Major Grey could see at a glance that Mary Walden would not be accessible for days even with the best treatment. He left it to the other two officers to hospitalize the child and set out for the Manz apartment.

He used his master wristband to open the door there, and found a woman standing in the middle of the room, wrapped in a sheet.

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He knew that this must be Helen Walden. It was odd how ill-fitting Clara Manz's softly sensual makeup seemed, even to a stranger, on the more rigidly composed face before him. He guessed that Helen would wear color higher on her cheeks and the mouth would be done in severe lines. Certainly the present haughty face struggled with its incongruous makeup as well as the indignity of her dress.

She pulled the sheet tighter about her and said icily, "I will not wear that woman's clothes."

Major Grey introduced himself and asked, "Where is Bill Walden?"

"He shifted! He left me with . . . Oh, I'm so ashamed!"

Major Grey shared her loathing. There was no way to escape the conditioning of childhood—sex relations between hyperalter and hypoalter were more than outlawed, they were in themselves disgusting. If they were allowed, they could destroy this civilization. Those idealists—they were almost all hypoalters, of course—who wanted the old terminology changed didn't take that into account. Next thing they'd want children to live with their actual parents!

Major Grey stepped into the bedroom. Through the bathroom door beyond, he could see Conrad Manz changing his makeup.

Conrad turned and eyed him bluntly. "Would you mind staying out of here till I'm finished? I've had about all I can take."

Major Grey shut the door and returned to Helen Walden. He took a hypothalamic block from his own pharmacase and handed it to her. "Here, you're probably on very low drug levels. You'd better take this." He poured her a glass of pop from a decanter and, while they waited for Conrad, he dialed the nearest shifting station on the visiophone and ordered up an emergency shifting costume for her.

When at last they were both dressed, made up to their satisfaction and drugged to his satisfaction, he had them sit on a couch together across from him. They sat at opposite ends of it, stiff with resentment at each other's presence.

Major Grey said calmly, "You realize that this matter is coming to a Medicorps trial. It will be serious."

Major Grey watched their faces. On hers he saw grim determination. On Conrad's face he saw the heavy movement of alarm. The man loved his wife. That was going to help. "It is necessary in a case such as this for the Medicorps to weigh your decisions along with the scientific evidence we will accumulate. Unfortunately, the number of lay-

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men directly involved in this case —and not on trial—is only two, due to your peculiar marriage. If the hypoalters, Clara and Conrad, were married to other partners, we might call on as many as six involved persons and obtain a more equitable lay judgment. As it stands, the entire responsibility rests on the two of you."

Helen Walden was primly confident. "I don't see how we can fail to treat the matter with perfect logic. After all, it is not *we* who neglect our drug levels . . . They *were* refusing to take their drugs, weren't they?" she asked, hoping for the worst and certain she was right.

"Yes, this is drug refusal." Major Grey paused while she relished the answer. "But I must correct you in one impression. Your proper drug levels do not assure that you will act logically in this matter. The drugged mind *is* logical. However, its fundamental datum is that the drugs and drugged minds must be protected before everything else." He watched Conrad's face while he added, "Because of this, it is possible for you to arrive logically at a conclusion that . . . death is the required solution." He paused, looking at their white lips. Then he said, "Actually, other, more suitable solutions may be possible."

"But they *were* refusing their drugs," she said. "You talk as if you are defending them. Aren't you a Medicorps prosecutor?"

"I do not prosecute *people* in the ancient 20th Century sense, Mrs. Walden. I prosecute the *acts* of drug refusal and communication breaks. There is quite a difference."

"Well!" she said almost explosively. "I always knew Bill would get into trouble sooner or later with his wild, antisocial ideas. I never *dreamed* the Medicorps would take *his* side."

Major Grey held his breath, almost certain now that she would walk into the trap. If she did, he could save Clara Manz before the trial.

"After all, they have broken every communication code. They have refused the drugs, a defiance aimed at our very lives. They—"

"Shut up!" It was the first time Conrad Manz had spoken since he sat down. "The Medicorps spent weeks gathering evidence and preparing their recommendations. You haven't seen any of that and you've already made up your mind. How logical is that? It sounds as if you *want* your husband dead. Maybe the poor devil had some reason, after all, for what he did." On the man's face there was the nearest approach to hate that the drugs would allow.

Major Grey let his breath out

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softly. They were split permanently. She would have to trade him a mild decision on Clara in order to save Bill. And even there, if the subsequent evidence gave any slight hope, Major Grey believed now that he could work on Conrad to hang the lay judgment and let the Medicorps' scientific recommendation go through unmodified.

He let them stew in their cross-purposed silence for a while and then nailed home a disconcerting fact.

"I think I should remind you that there are few advantages to having your alter extinguished in the *mnemonic eraser*. A man whose hyperalter has been extinguished must report on his regular shift days to a hospital and be placed for five days in suspended animation. This is not very healthy for the body, but necessary. Otherwise, everyone's natural distaste for his own alter and the understandable wish to spend twice as much time living would generate schemes to have one's alter sucked out by the eraser. That happened extensively back in the 21st Century before the five day suspension was required. It was also used as a 'cure' for schizophrenia, but it was, of course, only the brutal murder of innocent personalities."

Major Grey smiled grimly to himself. "Now I will have to ask you both to accompany me to the hospital. I will want you, Mrs. Walden, to shift at once to Mrs. Manz. Mr. Manz, you will have to remain under the close observation of an officer until Bill Walden tries to shift back. We have to catch him with an injection to keep him in shift."

THE young medicop put the syringe aside and laid his hand on Bill Walden's forehead. He pushed the hair back out of Bill's eyes.

"There, Mr. Walden, you don't have to struggle now."

Bill let his breath out in a long sigh. "You've caught me. I can't shift any more, can I?"

"That's right, Mr. Walden. Not unless we want you to." The young man picked up his medical equipment and stepped aside.

Bill noticed then the Medicorps officer standing in the background. The man was watching as though he contemplated some melancholy distance. "I am Major Grey, Bill. I'm handling your case."

Bill did not answer. He lay staring at the hospital ceiling. Then he felt his mouth open in a slow grin.

"What's funny?" Major Grey asked mildly.

"Leaving my hypoalter with my wife," Bill answered candidly. It had already ceased to

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be funny to him, but he saw Major Grey smile in spite of himself.

"They were quite upset when I found them. It must have been some scramble before that." Major Grey came over and sat in the chair vacated by the young man who had just injected Bill. "You know, Bill, we will need a complete analysis of you. We want to do everything we can to save you, but it will require your cooperation."

Bill nodded, feeling his chest tighten. Here it came. Right to the end, they would be tearing him apart to find out what made him work.

Major Grey must have sensed Bill's bitter will to resist. His resonant voice was soft, his face kindly. "We must have your sincere desire to help. We can't force you to do anything."

"Except die," Bill said.

"Maybe helping us get the information that might save your life at the trial isn't worth the trouble to you. But your aberration has seriously disturbed the lives of several people. Don't you think you owe it to them to help us prevent this sort of thing in the future?" Major Grey ran his hand through his whitening hair. "I thought you would like to know Mary will come through all right. We will begin shortly to acclimatize her to her new appointed parents, who will be visiting her each day. That will accelerate her recovery a great deal. Of course, right now she is still inaccessible."

The brutally clear picture of Mary alone in the storage room crashed back into Bill's mind. After a while, in such slow stages that the beginning was hardly noticeable, he began to cry. The young medicop injected him with a sleeping compound, but not before Bill knew he would do whatever the Medicorps wanted.

THE next day was crowded with battery after battery of tests. The interviews were endless. He was subjected to a hundred artificial situations and every reaction from his blood sugar to the frequency ranges of his voice was measured. They gave him only small amounts of drugs in order to test his reaction to them.

Late in the evening, Major Grey came by and interrupted an officer who was taking an electroencephalogram for the sixth time after injection of a drug.

"All right, Bill, you have really given us cooperation. But after you've had your dinner, I hope you won't mind if I come to your room and talk with you for a little while."

When Bill finished eating, he waited impatiently in his room for the Medicorps officer. Major

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Grey came soon after. He shook his head at the mute question Bill shot at him.

"No, Bill. We will not have the results of your tests evaluated until late tomorrow morning. I can't tell you a thing until the trial in any case."

"When will that be?"

"As soon as the evaluation of your tests is in." Major Grey ran his hand over his smooth chin and seemed to sigh. "Tell me, Bill, how do you feel about your case? How did you get into this situation and what do you think about it now?" The officer sat in the room's only chair and motioned Bill to the cot.

Bill was astonished at his sudden desire to talk about his problem. He had to laugh to cover it up. "I guess I feel as if I am being condemned for trying to stay sober." Bill used the ancient word with a mock tone of righteousness that he knew the major would understand.

Major Grey smiled. "How do you feel when you're sober?"

Bill searched his face. "The way the ancient Moderns did, I guess. I feel what happens to me the *way* it happens to me, not the artificial way the drugs let it happen. I think there is a way for us to live without the drugs and really enjoy life. Have you ever cut down on your drugs, Major?"

The officer shook his head.

Bill smiled at him dreamily. "You ought to try it. It's as though a new life has suddenly opened up. Everything looks different to you.

"Look, with an average life span of 100 years, each of us only lives 50 years and our alter lives the other 50. Yet even on half-time we experience only about half the living we'd do if we didn't take the drugs. We would be able to feel the loves and hatreds and desires of life. No matter how many mistakes we made, we would be able occasionally to live those intense moments that made the ancients great."

Major Grey said tonelessly, "The ancients were great at killing, cheating and debasing one another. And they were worse sober than *drunk*." This time he did not smile at the word.

Bill understood the implacable logic before him. The logic that had saved man from himself by smothering his spirit. The carefully achieved logic of the drugs that had seized upon the disassociated personality, and engineered it into a smoothly running machine, where there was no unhappiness because there was no great happiness, where there was no crime except failure to take the drugs or cross the alter sex line. Without drugs, he was

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capable of fury and he felt it now.

"You should see how foolish these communication codes look when you are undrugged. This stupid hide-and-seek of shifting! These two-headed monsters simpering about their artificial morals and their endless prescriptions! They belong in *crazy* houses! What use is there in such a world? If we are all this sick, we should die . . ."

Bill stopped and there was suddenly a ringing silence in the barren little room.

Finally Major Grey said, "I think you can see, Bill, that your desire to live without drugs is incompatable with this society. It would be impossible for us to maintain in you an artificial need for the drugs that would be healthy. Only if we can clearly demonstrate that this aberration is not an inherent part of your personality can we do something medically or psycho-surgically about it."

Bill did not at first see the implication in this. When he did, he thought of Clara rather than of himself, and his voice was shaken. "Is it a localized aberration in Clara?"

Major Grey looked at him levelly. "I have arranged for you to be with Clara Manz a little while in the morning." He stood up and said good night and was gone.

Slowly, as if it hurt him to move, Bill turned off the light and lay on the cot in the semi-dark. After a while he could feel his heart begin to take hold and he started feeling better. It was as though a man who had thought himself permanently expatriated had been told, "Tomorrow, you walk just over that hill and you will be home."

All through the night he lay awake, alternating between panic and desperate longing in a cycle with which finally he became familiar. At last, as a rusty light of dawn reddened his silent room, he fell into a troubled sleep.

He started awake in broad daylight. An orderly was at the door with his breakfast tray. He could not eat, of course. After the orderly left, he hastily changed to a new hospital uniform and washed himself. He redid his makeup with a trembling hand, straightened the bedclothes and then he sat on the edge of the cot.

No one came for him.

The young medicop who had given him the injection that caught him in shift finally entered, and was standing near him before Bill was aware of his presence.

"Good morning, Mr. Walden. How are you feeling?"

Bill's wildly oscillating tensions froze at the point where he could only move helplessly with

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events and suffer a constant, unchangeable longing.

It was as if in a dream that they moved in silence together down the long corridors of the hospital and took the elevator to an upper floor. The medicop opened the door to a room and let Bill enter. Bill heard the door close behind him.

Clara did not turn from where she stood looking out the window. Bill did not care that the walls of the chill little room were almost certainly recording every sight and sound. All his hunger was focused on the back of the girl at the window. The room seemed to ring with his racing blood. But he was slowly aware that something was wrong, and when at last he called her name, his voice broke.

Still without turning, she said in a strained monotone, "I want you to understand that I have consented to this meeting only because Major Grey has assured me it is necessary."

It was a long time before he could speak. "Clara, I need you."

She spun on him. "Have you no shame? You are married to my hyperalter—don't you understand that?" Her face was suddenly wet with tears and the intensity of her shame flamed at him from her cheeks. "How can Conrad ever forgive me for being with his hyperalter and talking about him? Oh, how *can* I have been so *mad?*"

"They have done something to you," he said, shaking with tension.

Her chin raised at this. She was defiant, he saw, though not toward himself—he no longer existed for her—but toward that part of herself which once had needed him and now no longer existed. "They have cured me," she declared. "They have cured me of everything but my shame, and they will help me get rid of that as soon as you leave this room."

Bill stared at her before leaving. Out in the corridor, the young medicop did not look him in the face. They went back to Bill's room and the officer left without a word. Bill lay down on his cot.

Presently Major Grey entered the room. He came over to the cot. "I'm sorry it had to be this way, Bill."

Bill's words came tonelessly from his dry throat. "Was it necessary to be cruel?"

"It was necessary to test the result of her psycho-surgery. Also, it will help her over her shame. She might otherwise have retained a seed of fear that she still loved you."

Bill did not feel anything any more. Staring at the ceiling, he knew there was no place left for

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him in this world and no one in it who needed him. The only person who had really needed him had been Mary, and he could not bear to think of how he had treated her. Now the Medicorps was efficiently curing the child of the hurt he had done her. They had already erased from Clara any need for him she had ever felt.

This seemed funny and he began to laugh. "Everyone is being cured of me."

"Yes, Bill. That is necessary." When Bill went on laughing

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Major Grey's voice turned quite sharp. "Come with me. It's time for your trial."

THE enormous room in which they held the trial was utterly barren. At the great oaken table around which they all sat, there were three Medicorps officers in addition to Major Grey.

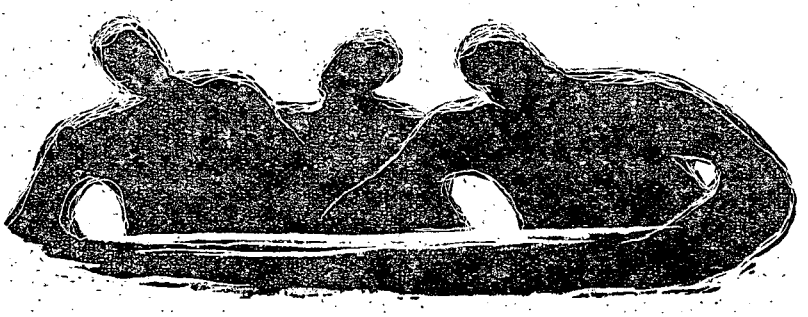
Helen did not speak to Bill when they brought him in. He was placed on the same side of the table with an officer between them. Two orderlies stood behind Bill's chair. Other than these people, there was no one in the room.

The great windows were high above the floor and displayed only the blissful sky. Now and then Bill saw a flock of pigeons waft aloft on silver-turning wings. Everyone at the table except himself had a copy of his case report and they discussed it with clipped sentences. Between the stone floor and the vaulted ceiling, a subtle echolalia babbled about Bill's problem behind their human talk.

The discussion of the report lulled when Major Grey rapped on the table. He glanced unsmiling from face to face, and his voice hurried the ritualized words: "This is a court of medicine, co-joining the results of medical science and considered lay judgment to arrive at a decision in the case of patient Bill Walden. The patient is hospitalized for a history of drug refusal and communication breaks. We have before us the medical case record of patient Walden. Has everyone present studied this record?"

All at the table nodded.

"Do all present feel competent



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to pass judgment in this case?"

Again there came the agreement.

Major Grey continued, "It is my duty to advise you, in the presence of the patient, of the profound difference between a trial for simple drug refusal and one in which that aberration is compounded with communication breaks.

"It is true that no other aberration is possible when the drugs are taken as prescribed. After all, the drugs *are* the basis for our schizophrenic society. Nevertheless, simple drug refusal often is a mere matter of physiology, which is easy enough to remedy.

"A far more profound threat to our society is the break in communication. This generally is more deeply motivated in the patient, and is often inaccessible to therapy. Such a patient is driven to emotive explorations which place the various ancient passions, and the infamous art of *historical gesture,* such as 'give me liberty or give me death,' above the welfare of society."

BILL watched the birds flash down the sky, a handful of heavenly coin. Never had it seemed to him so good to look at the sky. *If they hospitalize me,* he thought, *I will be content forever to sit and look from windows.*

"Our schizophrenic society," Major Grey was saying, "holds together and runs smoothly because, in each individual, the personality conflicts have been compartmentalized between hyperalter and hypoalter. On the social level, conflicting personalities are kept on opposite shifts and never contact each other. Or they are kept on shifts where contact is possible no more than one or two days out of ten. Bill Walden's break of shift is the type of behavior designed to reactivate these conflicts, and to generate the destructive passions on which an undrugged mind feeds. Already illness and disrupted lives have resulted."

Major Grey paused and looked directly at Bill. "Exhaustive tests have demonstrated that your entire personality is involved. I might also say that the aberration to live without the drugs and to break communication codes *is* your personality. All these Medicorps officers are agreed on that diagnosis. It remains now for us of the Medicorps to sit with the laymen intimately involved and decide on the action to be taken. The only possible alternatives after that diagnosis are permanent hospitalization or . . . total removal of the personality by mnemonic erasure."

Bill could not speak. He saw Major Grey nod to one of the

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orderlies and felt the man pushing up his sleeve and injecting his nerveless arm. They were forcing him to shift, he knew, so that Conrad Manz could sit on the trial and participate.

Helplessly, he watched the great sky blacken and the room dim and disappear.

MAJOR Grey did not avert his face, as did the others, while the shift was in progress. Helen Walden, he saw, was dramatizing her shame at being present during a shift, but the Medicorps officers simply stared at the table. Major Grey watched the face of Conrad Manz take form while the man who was going to be tried faded.

Bill Walden had been without makeup, and as soon as he was sure Manz could hear him, Major Grey apologized. "I hope you won't object to this brief interlude in public without makeup. You are present at the trial of Bill Walden."

Conrad Manz nodded and Major Grey waited another full minute for the shift to complete itself before he continued. "Mr. Manz, during the two days you waited in the hospital for us to catch Walden in shift, I discussed this case quite thoroughly with you, especially as it applied to the case of Clara Manz, on which we were already working.

"You will recall that in the case of your wife, the Medicorps diagnosis was one of a clearly localized aberration. It was quite simple to apply the mnemonic eraser to that small section without disturbing in any way her basic personality. Medicorps agreement was for this procedure and the case did not come to trial, but simply went to operation, because lay agreement was obtained. First yourself and eventually—" Major Grey paused and let the memory of Helen's stubborn insistence that Clara die stir in Conrad's mind — "Mrs. Walden agreed with the Medicorps."

Major Grey let the room wait in silence for a while. "The case of Bill Walden is quite different. The aberration involves the whole personality, and the alternative actions to be taken are permanent hospitalization or total erasure. In this case, I believe that Medicorps opinion will be divided as to proper action and—" Major Grey paused again and looked levelly at Conrad Manz—"this may be true, also, of the lay opinion."

"How's that, Major?" demanded the highest ranking Medicorps officer present, a colonel named Hart, a tall, handsome man on whom the military air was a becoming skin. "What do you mean about Medicorps opinion being divided?"

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Major Grey answered quietly, "I'm holding out for hospitalization."

Colonel Hart's face reddened. He thrust it forward and straightened his back. "That's preposterous! This is a clear-cut case of a dangerous threat to our society, and we, let me remind you, are *sworn* to protect that society."

Major Grey felt very tired. It was, after all, difficult to understand why he always fought so hard against erasure of these aberrant cases. But he began with quiet determination. "The threat to society is effectively removed by either of the alternatives, hospitalization or total erasure. I think you can all see from Bill Walden's medical record that his is a well rounded personality with a remarkable mind. In the environment of the 20th Century, he would have been an outstanding citizen, and possibly, if there had been more like him, our present society would have been better for it.

"Our history has been one of weeding out all personalities that did not fit easily into our drugged society. Today there are so few left that I have handled only 136 in my entire career . . ."

Major Grey saw that Helen Walden was tensing in her chair. He realized suddenly that she sensed better than he the effect he was having on the other men.

"We should not forget that each time we erase one of these personalties," he pressed on relentlessly, "society loses irrevocably a certain capacity for change. If we eliminate all personalities who do not fit, we may find ourselves without any minds capable of meeting future change. Our direct ancestors were largely the inmates of mental hospitals . . . we are fortunate *they* were not erased. Conrad Manz," he asked abruptly, "what is your opinion on the case of Bill Walden?"

Helen Walden started, but Conrad Manz shrugged his muscular shoulders. "Oh, hospitalize the three-headed monster!"

Major Grey snapped his eyes directly past Colonel Hart and fastened them on the Medicorps captain. "Your opinion, Captain?"

But Helen Walden was too quick. Before he could rap the table for order, she had her thin words hanging in the echoing room. "Having been Mr. Walden's wife for 15 years, my sentiments naturally incline me to ask for hospitalization. That is why I may safely say, if Major Grey will pardon me, that the logic of the drugs does not entirely fail us in a situation like this."

Helen waited while all present got the idea that Major Grey had accused them of being illogical. "Bill's aberration has led to our

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daughter's illness. And think how quickly it contaminated Clara Manz! I cannot ask that society any longer expose itself, even to the extent of keeping Bill in the isolation of the hospital, for my purely sentimental reasons.

"As for Major Grey's closing remarks, I cannot see how it is fair to bring my husband to trial as a threat to society, if some future change is expected, in which a man of his behavior would benefit society. Surely such a change could only be one that would ruin our present world, or Bill would hardly fit it. I would not want to save Bill or anyone else for such a future."

She did not have to say anything further. Both of the other Medicorps officers were now fully roused to their duty. Colonel Hart, of course, "humphed" at the opinions of a woman and cast his with Major Grey. But the fate of Bill Walden was sealed.

Major Grey sat, weary and uneasy, as the creeping little doubts began. In the end, he would be left with the one big stone-heavy doubt . . . could he have gone through with this if he had not been drugged, and how would the logic of the trial look without drugs?

He became aware of the restiveness in the room. They were waiting for him, now that the decision was irrevocable. Without the drugs, he reflected, they might be feeling—what was the ancient word, *guilt?* No, that was what the criminal felt. *Remorse?* That would be what they should be feeling. Major Grey wished Helen Walden could be forced to witness the erasure. People did not realize what it was like.

What was it Bill had said? "You should see how foolish these communication codes look when you are undrugged. This stupid hide-and-seek of shifting . . ."

Well, wasn't that a charge to be *inspected* seriously, if you were taking it seriously enough to kill the man for it? As soon as this case was completed, he would have to return to his city and blot himself out so that his own hyperalter, Ralph Singer, a painter of bad pictures and a useless fool, could waste five more days. To that man he lost half his possible living days. What earthly good was Singer?

Major Grey roused himself and motioned the orderly to inject Conrad Manz, so that Bill Walden would be forced back into shift.

"As soon as I have advised the patient of our decision, you will all be dismissed. Naturally, I anticipated this decision and have arranged for immediate erasure. After the erasure, Mr. Manz, you will be instructed to appear regularly for suspended animation."

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FOR some reason, the first thing Bill Walden did when he became conscious of his surroundings was to look out the great window for the flock of birds. But they were gone.

Bill looked at Major Grey and said, "What are you going to do?"

The officer ran his hand back through his whitening hair, but he looked at Bill without wavering. "You will be erased."

Bill began to shake his head. "There is something wrong," he said.

"Bill . . ." the major began.

"There is something wrong," Bill repeated hopelessly. "Why must we be split so there is always something missing in each of us? Why must we be stupefied with drugs that keep us from knowing what we should feel? I was trying to live a better life. I did not want to hurt anyone."

"But you *did* hurt others," Major Grey said bluntly. "You would do so again if allowed to function in your own way in this society. Yet it would be insufferable to you to be hospitalized. You would be shut off forever from searching for another Clara Manz. And—there is no one else for you, is there?"

Bill looked up, his eyes cringing as though they stared at death. "No one else?" he asked vacantly. "No one?"

The two orderlies lifted him up by his arms, almost carrying him into the operating room. His feet dragged helplessly. He made no resistance as they lifted him onto the operating table and strapped him down.

Beside him was the great panel of the mnemonic eraser with its thousand unblinking eyes. The helmetlike prober cabled to this calculator was fastened about his skull, and he could no longer see the professor who was lecturing in the amphitheater above. But along his body he could see the group of medical students. They were looking at him with great interest, too young not to let the human drama interfere with their technical education.

The professor, however, droned in a purely objective voice. "The mnemonic eraser can selectively shunt from the brain any identifiable category of memory, and erase the synaptic patterns associated with its translation into action. Circulating memory is disregarded. The machine only locates and shunts out those energies present as permanent memory. These are there in part as permanently echoing frequencies in closed cytoplasmic systems. These systems are in contact with the rest of the nervous system only during the phenomenon of remembrance. Remembrance occurs when, at all the synapses in a given network 'y,'

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the permanently echoing frequencies are duplicated as transient circulating frequencies.

"The objective in a total operation of the sort before us is to distinguish all the stored permanent frequencies, typical of the personality you wish to extinguish, from the frequencies typical of the other personality present in the brain."

Major Grey's face, very tired, but still wearing a mask of adamant reassurance, came into Bill's vision. "There will be a few moments of drug-induced terror, Bill. That is necessary for the operation. I hope knowing it beforehand will help you ride with it. It will not be for long." He squeezed Bill's shoulder and was gone.

"The trick was learned early in our history, when this type of total operation was more often necessary," the professor continued. "It is really quite simple to extinguish one personality while leaving the other undisturbed. The other personality in the case before up has been drug-immobilized to keep this one from shifting. At the last moment, this personality before us will be drug-stimulated to bring it to the highest possible pitch of total activity. This produces utterly disorganized activity, every involved neuron and synapse being activated simultaneously by the drug. It is then a simple matter for the mnemonic eraser to locate all permanently echoing frequencies involved in this personality and suck them into its receiver."

Bill was suddenly aware that a needle had been thrust into his arm. Then it was as though all the terror, panic and traumatic incidents of his whole life leaped into his mind. All the pleasant experiences and feelings he had ever known were there, too, but were transformed into terror.

A bell was ringing with regular strokes. Across the panel of the mnemonic eraser, the tiny counting lights were alive with movement.

There was in Bill a fright, a demand for survival so great that it could not be felt.

It was actually from an island of complete calm that part of him saw the medical students rising dismayed and white-faced from their seats. It was apart from himself that his body strained to lift some mountain and filled the operating amphitheater with shrieking echoes. And all the time the thousand eyes of the mnemonic eraser flickered in swift patterns, a silent measure of the cells and circuits of his mind.

Abruptly the tiny red counting lights went off, a red beam glowed with a burr of warning. Someone said, "Now!" The mind of Bill Walden flashed along a wire as

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electrical energy and, converted on the control panel into mechanical energy, it spun a small ratchet counter.

"Please sit down," the professor said to the shaken students. "The drug that has kept the other personality immobilized is being counteracted by this next injection. Now that the sickly personality has been dissipated, the healthy one can be brought back rapidly.

"As you are aware, the synapse operates on the binary 'yes-no' choice system of an electronic calculator. All synapses which were involved in the diseased personality have now been reduced to an atypical, uniform threshold. Thus they can be re-educated in new patterns by the healthy personality remaining . . . There, you see the countenance of the healthy personality appearing."

IT WAS Conrad Manz who looked up at them with a wry grin. He rotated his shoulders to loosen them. "How many of you pushed old Bill Walden around? He left me with some sore muscles. Well, I did that often enough to him . . ."

Major Grey stood over him, face sick and white with the horror of what he had seen. "According to law, Mr. Manz, you and your wife are entitled to five rest days on your next shift. When they are over, you will, of course, report for suspended animation for what would have been your hyperalter's shift."

Conrad Manz's grin shrank and vanished. "*Would* have been? Bill is—gone?"

"Yes."

"I never thought I'd miss him." Conrad looked as sick as Major Grey felt. "It makes me feel—I don't know if I can explain it—sort of *amputated*. As though something's wrong with me because everybody else has an alter and I don't. Did the poor son of a straitjacket suffer much?"

"I'm afraid he did."

Conrad Manz lay still for a moment with his eyes closed and his mouth thin with pity and remorse. "What will happen to Helen?"

"She'll be all right," Major Grey said. "There will be Bill's insurance, naturally, and she won't have much trouble finding another husband. That kind never seems to."

"Five rest days?" Conrad repeated. "Is that what you said?" He sat up and swung his legs off the table, and he was grinning again. "I'll get in a whole shift of jet-skiing! No, wait—I've got a date with the wife of a friend of mine out at the rocket grounds. I'll take Clara out there; she'll like some of the men."

Major Grey nodded abstract-

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edly. "Good idea." He shook hands with Conrad Manz, wished him fun on his rest shift, and left.

Taking a helicopter back to his city, Major Grey thought of his own hyperalter, Ralph Singer. He'd often wished that the silly fool could be erased. Now he wondered how it would be to have only one personality, and, wondering, realized that Conrad Manz had been right—it *would* be like amputation, the shameful distinction of living in a schizophrenic society with no alter.

No, Bill Walden had been wrong, completely wrong, both about drugs and being split into two personalities. What one made up in pleasure through not taking drugs was more than lost in the suffering of conflict, frustration and hostility. And having an alter—any kind, even one as useless as Singer—meant, actually, *not being alone.*

Major Grey parked the helicopter and found a shifting station. He took off his makeup, addressed and mailed his clothes, and waited for the shift to come.

It was a pretty wonderful society he lived in, he realized. He wouldn't trade it for the kind Bill Walden had wanted. Nobody in his right mind would.

—WYMAN GUIN

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OPERATION DISTRESS

By LESTER DEL RAY

BILL ADAMS was halfway back from Mars when he noticed the red rash on his hands. He'd been reaching for one of the few remaining tissues to cover a sneeze, while scratching vigorously at the base of his neck. Then he saw the red spot, and his hand halted, while all desire to sneeze gasped out of him.

He sat there, five feet seven inches of lean muscle and bronzed skin, sweating and staring, while the blond hair on the back of his neck seemed to stand on end. Finally he dropped his hand and pulled himself careful-

Illustrated by WILLER

Explorers who dread spiders and snakes prove that heroism is always more heroic to outsiders. Then there's the case of the first space pilot to Mars who developed the itch—

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ly erect. The cabin in the spaceship was big enough to permit turning around, but not much more, and with the ship cruising without power, there was almost no gravity to keep him from overshooting his goal.

He found the polished plate that served as a mirror and studied himself. His eyes were puffy, his nose was red, and there were other red splotches and marks on his face.

Whatever it was, he had it bad!

Pictures went through his head, all unpleasant. He'd been only a kid when the men came back from the South Pacific in the last war; but an uncle had spent years dying of some weird disease that the doctors couldn't identify. That had been from something caught on Earth. What would happen when the disease was from another planet?

It was ridiculous. Mars had no animal life, and even the thin lichenlike plants were sparse and tiny. A man couldn't catch a disease from a plant. Even horses didn't communicate their ills to men. Then Bill remembered gangrene and cancer, which could attack any life, apparently.

He went back to the tiny Geiger-Muller counter, but there was no sign of radiation from the big atomic motor that powered the ship. He stripped his clothes off, spotting more of the red marks breaking out, but finding no sign of parasites. He hadn't really believed it, anyhow. That wouldn't account for the sneezing and sniffles, or the puffed eyes and burning inside his nose and throat.

Dust, maybe? Mars had been dusty, a waste of reddish sand and desert silt that made the Sahara seem like paradise, and it had settled on his spacesuit, to come in through the airlocks with him. But if it contained some irritant, it should have been worse on Mars than now. He could remember nothing annoying, and he'd turned on the tiny, compact little static dust traps, in any case, before leaving, to clear the air.

He went back to one of the traps now, and ripped the cover off it.

The little motor purred briskly. The plastic rods turned against fur brushes, while a wiper cleared off any dust they picked up. There was no dust he could see; the traps had done their work.

Some plant irritant, like poison ivy? No, he'd always worn his suit—Mars had an atmosphere, but it wasn't anything a man could breathe long. The suit was put on and off with automatic machine grapples, so he couldn't have touched it.

The rash seemed to get worse on his body as he looked at it.

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This time, he tore one of the tissues in quarters as he sneezed. The little supply was almost gone; there was never space enough for much beyond essentials in a spaceship, even with the new atomic drive. As he looked for spots, the burning in his nose seemed to increase.

He dropped back to the pilot seat, cursing. Two months of being cramped up in this cubicle, sweating out the trip to Mars without knowing how the new engine would last; three weeks on Mars, mapping frantically to cover all the territory he could, and planting little flags a hundred miles apart; now a week on the trip back at high acceleration most of the way—and this! He'd expected adventure of some kind. Mars, though, had proved as interesting as a sandpile, and even the "canals" had proved to be only mineral striations, invisible from the ground.

He looked for something to do, but found nothing. He'd developed his films the day before, after carefully cleaning the static traps and making sure the air was dust-free. He'd written up the accounts. And he'd been coasting along on the hope of getting home to a bath, a beer, and a few bull sessions, before he began to capitalize on being the first man to reach another planet beyond the Moon.

He cut on full acceleration again, more certain of his motors than of himself. He'd begun to notice the itching yesterday; today he was breaking out in the rash. How long would whatever was coming take? Good God, he might die — from something as humiliating and undramatic as this!

It hadn't hit him before, fully. There was no knowing about diseases from other planets. Men had developed immunity to the germs found on Earth; but just as smallpox had proved so fatal to the Indians and syphilis to Europe when they first hit, there was no telling how wildly this might progress. It might go away in a day, or it might kill him just as quickly.

He was figuring his new orbit on a tiny calculator. In two days at this acceleration, he could reach radar-distance of Earth; in four, he could land. The tubes might burn out in continuous firing. But the other way, he'd be two weeks making a landing, and most diseases he could remember seemed faster than that.

Bill wiped the sweat off his forehead, scratched at other places that were itching, and stared down at the small disk of Earth. There were doctors there —and, brother, he'd need them fast!

Things were a little worse

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when the first squeals came from the radar two days later. He'd run out of tissues, and his nose was a continual drip, while breathing seemed almost impossible. He was running some fever, too, though he had no way of knowing how much.

He cut his receiver in, punched out the code on his key. The receiver pipped again at him, bits of message getting through, but unclearly. There was no response to his signals. He checked his chronometer and flipped over the micropages of his *Ephemeris;* the big radar at Washington was still out of line with him, and the signals had to cut through too much air to come clearly. It should be good in another hour.

But right now, an hour seemed longer than a normal year. He checked the dust tray again, tried figuring out other orbits, managed to locate the Moon, and scratched. Fifteen minutes. There was no room for pacing up and down. He pushed the back down from the pilot seat, lowered the table, and pulled out his bunk; he remade it, making sure all the corners were perfect. Then he folded it back and lifted the table and seat. That took less than five minutes.

His hands were shaking worse when the automatic radar signals began to come through more clearly. It wasn't an hour, but he could wait no longer. He opened the key and began to send. It would take fifteen seconds for the signal to reach Earth, and another quarter minute for an answer, even if an operator was on duty.

Half a minute later, he found one was. "Earth to Mars Rocket I. Thank God, you're ahead of schedule. If your tubes hold out, crowd them. Two other nations have ships out now. The U. N. has ruled that whoever comes back first with mapping surveys can claim the territory mapped. We're rushing the construction, but we need the ship for the second run if we're to claim our fair territory. Aw, hell—congratulations!"

He'd started hammering at his key before they finished, giving the facts on the tubes, which were standing up beyond all expectations. "And get a doctor ready—a bunch of them," he finished. "I seem to have picked up something like a disease."

There was a long delay before an answer came this time—more than five minutes. The hand on the key was obviously different, slower and not as steady. "What symptoms, Adams? Give all details!"

He began, giving all the information he had, from the first itching through the rash and the fever. Again, longer this time, the

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main station hesitated.

"Anything I can do about it now?" Bill asked, finally. "And how about having those doctors ready?"

"We're checking with Medical," the signals answered. "We're . . . Here's their report. Not enough data—could be anything. Dozens of diseases like that. Nothing you can do, except try salt water gargle and spray; you've got stuff for that. Wash off rash with soap and hot water, followed by some of your hypo. We'll get a medical kit up to the Moon for you."

He let that sink in, then clicked back: "The *Moon?*"

"You think you can land here with whatever you've got, man? There's no way of knowing how contagious it is. And keep an hourly check with us. If you pass out, we'll try to get someone out in a Moon rocket to pick you up. But we can't risk danger of infecting the whole planet. You're quarantined on the Moon—we'll send up landing instructions later—not even for Luna Base, but where there will be no chance of contamination for others. You didn't really expect to come back here, did you, Adams?"

He should have thought of it. He knew that. And he knew that the words from Earth weren't as callous as they sounded. Down there, men would be sweating with him, going crazy trying to do something. But they were right. Earth had to be protected first; Bill Adams was only one out of two and a half billions, even if he had reached a planet before any other man.

Yeah, it was fine to be a hero. But heroes shouldn't menace the rest of the world.

Logically, he knew they were right. That helped him get his emotions under control. "Where do you want me to put down?"

"Tycho. It isn't hard to spot for radar-controlled delivery of supplies to you, but it's a good seven hundred miles from Lunar Base. And look—we'll try to get a doctor to you. But keep us informed if anything slips. We need those maps, if we can find a way to sterilize 'em."

"Okay," he acknowledged. "And tell the cartographers there are no craters, no intelligence, and only plants about half an inch high. Mars stinks."

They'd already been busy, he saw, as he teetered down on his jets for a landing on Tycho. Holding control was the hardest job he'd ever done. A series of itchings cropped out just as the work got tricky, when he could no longer see the surface, and had to go by feel. But somehow he made it. Then he relaxed and began an orgy of scratching.

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And he'd thought there was something romantic about being a hero!

The supplies that had already been sent up by the superfast unmanned missiles would give him something to do, at least. He moved back the two feet needed to reach his developing tanks and went through the process of spraying and gargling. It was soothing enough while it went on, but it offered only momentary help.

Then his stomach began showing distress signs. He fought against it, tightening up. It did no good. His hasty breakfast of just black coffee wanted to come up—and did, giving him barely time to make the little booth.

He washed his mouth out and grabbed for the radar key, banging out a report on this. The doctors must have been standing by down at the big station, because there was only a slight delay before the answering signal came: "Any blood?"

Another knot added itself to his intestines. "I don't know — don't think so, but I didn't look."

"Look, next time. We're trying to get this related to some of the familiar diseases. It must have some relation — there are only so many ways a man can be sick. We've got a doctor coming over, Adams. None on the Moon, but we're shipping him through. He'll set down in about nine hours. And there's some stuff to take on the supply missiles. May not help, but we're trying a mixture of the antibiotics. Also some ACS and anodynes for the itching and rash. Hope they work. Let us know any reaction."

Bill cut off. He'd have to try. They were as much in the dark about this as he was, but they had a better background for guessing and trial and error. And if the bugs in him happened to like tachiomycetin, he wouldn't be too much worse off. Damn it, *had* there been blood?

He forced his mind off it, climbed into his clothes and then into the spacesuit that hung from the grapples. It moved automatically into position, the two halves sliding shut and sealing from outside. The big gloves on his hands were too clumsy for such operations.

Then he went bounding across the Moon. Halfway to the supplies he felt the itching come back, and he slithered and wriggled around, trying to scratch his skin against his clothing. It didn't help much. He was sweating harder, and his eyes were watering. He manipulated the little visor-cleaning gadget, trying to poke his face forward to brush the frustration tears from his eyes. He couldn't quite reach it.

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There were three supply missiles, each holding about two hundred pounds, Earth weight. He tied them together and slung them over his back, heading toward his ship. Here they weighed only a hundred pounds, and with his own weight and the suit added, the whole load came to little more than his normal weight on Earth.

He tried shifting the supplies around on his back, getting them to press against the spots of torment as he walked. It simply unbalanced him, without really relieving the itching. Fortunately, though, his eyes were clearing a little. He gritted his teeth and fought back through the powdery pumice surface, kicking up clouds of dust that settled slowly but completely—though the gravity was low, there was no air to hold them up.

Nothing had ever looked better than the airlock of the ship. He let the grapples hook the suit off him as soon as the outer seal was shut and went into a whirling dervish act. Aches and pains could be stood—but *itching!*

Apparently, though, the spray and gargle had helped a little, since his nose felt somewhat clearer and his eyes were definitely better. He repeated them, and then found the medical supplies, with a long list of instructions.

They were really shooting the pharmacy at him. He injected himself, swallowed things, rubbed himself down with others, and waited. Whatever they'd given him didn't offer any immediate help. He began to feel worse. But on contacting Earth by radar, he was assured that that might be expected.

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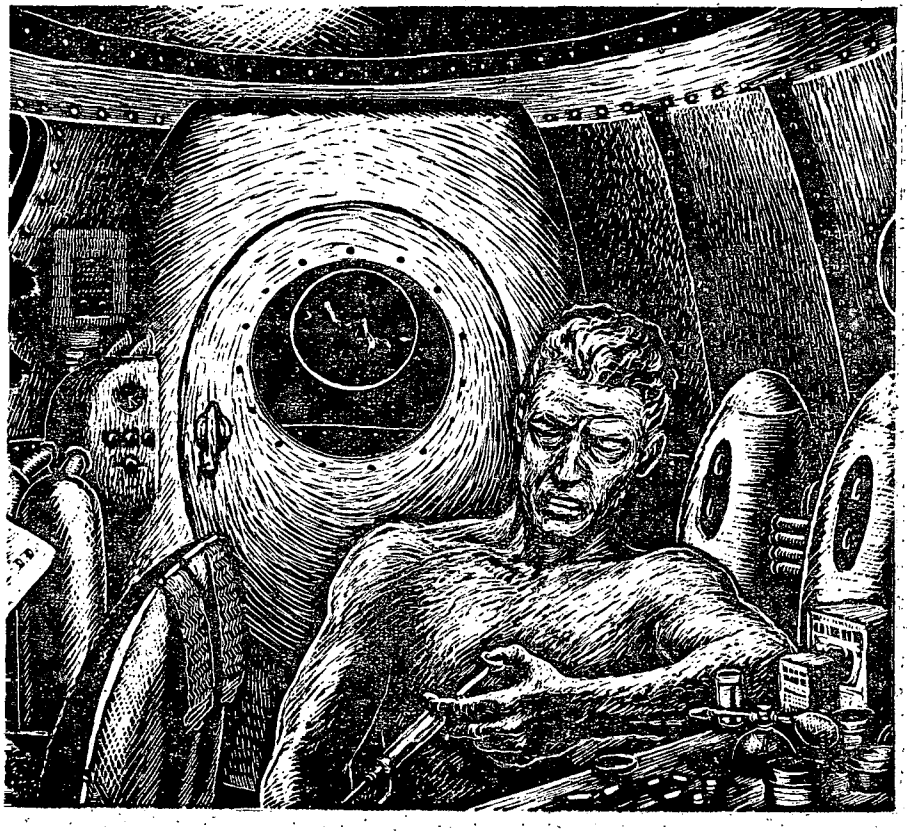
"We've got another missile coming, with metal foil for the maps and photos—plus a small copying camera. You can print them right on the metal, seal that in a can, and leave it for the rocket that's bringing the doctor. The pilot will blast over it—that should sterilize it—and pick it up when it cools."

Bill swore, but he was in his suit when the missile landed, heading out across the pumice-covered wastes toward it. The salves had helped the itching a little, but not much. And his nose had grown worse again.

He jockeyed the big supply can out of the torpedo-shaped missile, packed it on his back,



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and headed for his ship. The itching was acting up as he sweated—this made a real load, about like packing a hundred bulky pounds over his normal Earth weight through the soft drift of the pumice. But his nose was clearing again; it was apparently becoming cyclic. He'd have to relay that information back to the medics. And where were they getting a doctor crazy enough to take a chance with him?

He climbed out of the suit and went through the ritual of scratching, noticing that his fever had gone up, and that his muscles were shaking. His head seemed light, as if he were in for a spell of dizziness. They'd be interested in that, back on Earth, though it wouldn't do much good. He couldn't work up a clinical attitude about himself. All he wanted was a chance to get over this disease before it killed him.

He dragged out the photo and copying equipment, under a red light. It filled what little space was left in his cubbyhole cabin. Then he swore, gulping down more of the pills where they were waiting for him. The metal sheets were fine. They were excellent. The only thing wrong was that they wouldn't fit his developing trays—and they were tough enough to give him no way of cutting them to size.

He stuffed them back in their container and shoved it into the airlock. Then his stomach kicked up again. He couldn't see any blood in the result, but he couldn't be sure—the color of the pills might hide traces. He flushed it down, his head turning in circles, and went to the radar. This time he didn't even wait for a reply; let them worry about their damned maps. They could send cutting equipment with the doctor and pick up the things later. They could pick up his corpse and cremate it at the same time, for all he cared right now.

He yanked out his bunk and slumped into it, curling up as much as the itching would permit. And finally, for the first time in over fifty hours, he managed to doze off, though his sleep was full of nightmares.

It was the sound of the bull-throated chemical rocket that brought him out of it—the sound traveling along the surface through the rocks and up through the metal ship, even without air to carry it.

He could feel the rumble of its takeoff later, but he waited long after that for the doctor. There was no knock on the port. Finally he pulled himself up from the bunk, sweating and shaken, and looked out.

The doctor was there—or at least a man in a spacesuit was. But somebody had been in a hur-

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ry for volunteers, and given the man no basic training at all. The figure would pull itself erect, make a few strides that were all bounce and no progress, and then slide down into the pumice. Moon-walking was tricky until you learned how.

Bill sighed, scratching unconsciously, and made his way somehow out to his suit, climbing into it. He paused for a final good scratch, and then the grapples took over. This time, he stumbled also as he made his way across the powdery rubble. But the other man was making no real progress at all.

Bill reached him, and touched helmets long enough to issue simple instructions through metal sound conduction. Then he managed to guide the other's steps; there had been accounts of the days of learning spent by the first men on the Moon, but it wasn't that bad with an instructor to help. The doctor picked up as they went along. Bill's legs were buckling under him by then, and the itches were past endurance. At the end, the doctor was helping him. But somehow they made the ship, and were getting out of the suits—Bill first, then the doctor, using the grapples under Bill's guidance.

The doctor was young, and obviously scared, but fighting his fear. He'd been picked for his smallness to lighten the load on the chemical rocket, and his little face was intent. But he managed a weak grin.

"Thanks, Adams. I'm Doctor Ames—Ted to you. Get onto that cot. You're about out on your feet."

The test he made didn't take long, but his head was shaking at the conclusion.

"Your symptoms make no sense," he summarized. "I've got a feeling some are due to one thing, some to another. Maybe we'll have to wait until I come down with it and compare notes."

His grin was wry, but Bill was vaguely glad that he wasn't trying any bedside manner. There wasn't much use in thanking the man for volunteering—Ames had known what he was up against, and he might be scared, but his courage was above thanks.

"What about the maps?" Bill asked. "They tell you?"

"They've left cutters outside. I started to bring them. Then the pumice got me—I couldn't stand upright in it. They'll pick up the maps later, but they're important. The competing ships will claim our territory if we don't file first."

He knocked the dust off his instrument, and wiped his hands. Bill looked down at the bed to see a fine film of Moon silt there. They'd been bringing in too much

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on the suits—it was too fine, and the traps weren't getting it fast enough.

He got up shakily, moving toward the dust trap that had been running steadily. But now it was out of order, obviously, with the fur brushes worn down until they could generate almost no static against the rod. He groped into the supplies, hoping there would be replacements.

Ames caught his arm. "Cut it out, Adams. You're in no shape for this. Hey, how long since you've eaten?"

Bill thought it over, his head thick. "I had coffee before I landed."

Doctor Ames nodded quickly. "Vomiting, dizziness, tremors, excess sweating—what did you expect, man? You put yourself under this strain, not knowing what comes next, having to land with an empty stomach, skipping meals and loading your stomach with pills — and probably no sleep! Those symptoms are perfectly normal."

He was at the tiny galley equipment, fixing quick food as he spoke. But his face was still sober. He was probably thinking of the same thing that worried Bill—an empty stomach didn't make the itching rash, the runny nose and eyes, and the general misery that had begun the whole thing.

He sorted through the stock of replacement parts, a few fieldsistors, suit wadding, spare gloves, cellophane-wrapped gadgets. Then he had it. Ames was over, urging him toward the cot, but he shook him off.

"Got to get the dust out of here — dust'll make the itching worse. Moon dust is sharp, Doc. Just install new brushes . . . Where are those instructions? Yeah, insert the cat's fur brushes under the . . . *Cat's* fur? Is *that* what they use, Doc?"

"Sure. It's cheap and generates static electricity. Do you expect sable?"

Bill took the can of soup and sipped it without tasting or thinking, his hand going toward a fresh place that itched. His nose began running, but he disregarded it. He still felt lousy, but strength was flowing through him, and life was almost good again.

He tossed the bunk back into its slot, lifted the pilot's stool, and motioned Ames forward. "You operate a key—hell, I *am* getting slow. You can contact Luna Base by phone, have them relay. There. Now tell 'em I'm blasting off pronto for Earth, and I'll be down in four hours with their plans."

"You're crazy." The words were flat, but there was desperation on the little doctor's face.

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He glanced about hastily, taking the microphone woodenly. "Adams, they'll have an atomic bomb up to blast you out before you're near Earth. They've got to protect themselves. You can't . . ."

Bill scratched, but there was the beginning of a grin on his face. "Nope, I'm not delirious now, though I damn near cracked up. You figured out half the symptoms. Take a look at those brushes—cat's fur brushes—and figure what they'll do to a man who was breathing the air and who is allergic to cats! All I ever had was some jerk in Planning who didn't check my medical record with trip logistics! I never had these symptoms until I unzipped the traps and turned 'em on. It got better whenever I was in the suit, breathing canned air. We should have known a man can't catch a disease from plants."

The doctor looked at him, and at the fur pieces he'd thrown into a wastebin, and the whiteness ran from his face. He was seeing his own salvation, and the chuckle began weakly, gathering strength as he turned to the microphone.

"Cat asthma—simple allergy. Who'd figure you'd get that in deep space? But you're right, Bill. It figures."

Bill Adams nodded as he reached for the controls, and the tubes began firing, ready to take them back to Earth. Then he caught himself and swung to the doctor.

"Doc," he said quickly, "just be sure and tell them this isn't to get out. If they'll keep still about it, so will I."

He'd make a hell of a hero on Earth if people heard of it, and he could use a little of a hero's reward.

No catcalls, thanks.

—LESTER DEL REY

The Big News Next Month . . .

THE PUPPET MASTERS

by Robert A. Heinlein

You asked for Heinlein—and here he is—with a three-part *book-length* serial of terrifying power and almost unbearably sustained suspense! What better time to start a subscription that at the beginning of a new Heinlein novel?

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THE PILOT

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AND THE BUSHMAN

By SYLVIA JACOBS

Technological upheavals caused by inventions of our own are bad enough, but this was the ultimate depression, caused by the ultimate alien invention—which no Earthman ever saw!

Illustrated by DAVID STONE

THE Ambassador from Outer Space sprang to his feet, taking Jerry's extended hand in a firm, warm grasp. Jerry had been prepared for almost anything — a scholarly brontosaurus, perhaps, or an educated squid or giant caterpillar with telepathic powers. But the Ambassador didn't even have antennae, gills, or green hair. He was a completely normal and even handsome human being.

"Scotch? Cigar?" the Ambassador offered cordially. "How can I help you, Mr. Jergins?"

Studying him, Jerry decided there *was* something peculiar about this extraterrestial, after

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all. He was too perfect. His shave was too close, his skin so unblemished as to suggest waxworks. Every strand of his distinguished iron-gray hair was impeccably placed. The negligent and just-right drape of his clothes covered a body shaped like a Sixth Century B.C. piece of Greek sculpture. No mere human could have look so unruffled, so utterly groomed, at three o'clock in the afternoon, in a busy office. A race, Jerry wondered, capable of taking any shape at will, in mimicry of the indigenous race of any planet?

"You *can* help me, but I'm not sure you *will*," Jerry said. "The rumor is that you won't do anything to ease this buyers' strike you started on Earth."

The Ambassador smiled. "You're a man who's not used to taking no for an answer, I gather. What's your proposition?"

"I'd like to contact some of the firms on the Federated Planets, show them how I could promote their merchandise on Earth. Earth is already clamoring for their goods. To establish a medium of exchange, we'd have to run simultaneous campaigns, promoting Earth merchandise on other planets."

"That would be difficult, even for a man of your promotional ability," the Ambassador said winningly. "You see, Earth is the only planet we've yet discovered where advertising—or promotion, to use the broader term—exists as a social and economic force."

"How in hell can anybody do business without it?" Jerry demanded.

"We don't do business in the sense you mean. Don't mistake me," the Ambassador added hastily, "we don't have precisely a communal economy, either. Our very well defined sense of ethics in regard to material goods is something I find impossible to describe in any Earth language. It's quite simple, so simple that you have to grow up with it to understand it. Our whole attitude toward material goods is conditioned by the Matter Repositor."

"*That* gadget!" Jerry said bitterly. "It was when you first mentioned it before the U.N. Assembly that all this trouble on Earth started. Everybody and his brother hopes that tomorrow he can buy a Matter Repositor, and never have to buy anything again. I came here mostly to ask you whether it's really true, that if you have one of those dinguses, you can bring anything you want into your living room."

"You *can*. In practice, of course, repositing just anything that took your fancy would produce economic anarchy."

"Let's put it this way," Jerry persisted. "Home appliances were

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my biggest accounts. Now, when we try to sell a refrigerator, the prospect says she's saving her cash till Matter Repositors get on the Earth market. She plans to reposit a refrigerator—not from her neighbor's kitchen, because that would be stealing—but from the factory. If the factory goes bust, people figure the government will have to subsidize building appliances. Now, could she really reposit a refrigerator?"

"She could. But she wouldn't want to."

"Why not?" Jerry asked, puzzled.

"If she conceived an illogical and useless desire for food refrigeration, she would simply reposit a block of cold air from, say, the North Pole."

"Oh, fine!" Jerry said sarcastically. "That would cause more unemployment in the refrigerator industry than repositing them without paying for them! But what do you mean about food refrigeration being illogical and useless?"

"Well, in a storage warehouse, there might be some reason for food preservation. But you don't need cold or canning. Why not just reposit the bacteria that cause the food to deteriorate? There's no need to store food in a home equipped with a Matter Repositor. You simply reposit one meal at a time. Fruits and vegetables direct from tree or field. Meat from a slaughterhouse, since it isn't humane to remove a pound of steak from a live steer. But even this is needless."

"Why?" Jerry bafflingly wanted to know.

"To free the maximum amount of the effort of thinking beings for non-material activities, each consumer can reposit the chemical elements of the food, synthesize his meal on the table. He can even reposit these elements directly into his stomach, or, to by-pass the effort of digestion, into his bloodstream as glycogen and amino acids."

"So refrigerators would be as dead an item as kerosene lamps in a city wired for electricity," Jerry agreed unhappily. "Suppose Mrs. Housewife, not needing a refrigerator, reposits a washing machine. The point I'm driving at —is there any practical way to compensate the factory, give it an incentive to produce more washing machines, without dragging in government control?"

"Why should the factory produce more washing machines? Who would want one? The housewife would simply reposit the dirt from her clothes into her flowerbed, without using water and soap. Or, more likely, reposit new clothes with different colors, fabrics, and styles. The Matter Repositor would eliminate

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textile mills and clothing factories. Earth's oceans have vast enough quantities of seaweed to eliminate the growing of cotton, wool, or flax. Or, again, you could reposit the chemical elements, either from the soil or from seawater."

Jerry pondered the extensive implications of these revelations. Finally he said, "What it boils down to is this. All Earth's bustling material activity, all the logging and construction, the mining and manufacturing, the planting and fishing, the printing and postal service, the great transportation and shipping effort, the cleaning and painting, the sewage disposal, even the bathing and self-adornment, consist, when you analyze them, of one process only—*putting something from where you don't want it to where you do.* There's not one single, solitary Earth invention or service left to advertise!"

"Nothing," the Ambassador agreed. "Which is exactly why advertising has not developed on the Federated Planets. You're fortunate that Earth doesn't have Matter Repositors. You'd be out of a job if it did."

"Oh, no!" Jerry said. "I could still advertise the gadget to end all gadgets—the Matter Repositor itself. I know other people have asked you this before, but could an Earth company get a franchise to import those machines here, or the license rights to manufacture them?"

"No," the Ambassador said, briefly and definitely.

"Mr. Ambassador," Jerry protested, "you've gone to a lot of trouble to explain things you must already be tired of explaining to Earthmen, just so I personally could be sure they weren't merely rumors or misinterpretations. Now that I get down to the real point, you suddenly become blunt and unqualified. Why?"

"Because there's a very serious question of ethics involved, wherever a more advanced civilization comes in contact with a relatively primitive one. For instance, when the white men came to America, the aborigines were introduced to gunpowder and firewater."

"So you people are keeping Matter Repositors away from us, like a mama keeping candy away from a baby who's hollering for it, because it's not good for him! You'd pass up a chance to name your own price—"

"The very way you phrase that remark indicates the danger. You regard personal gain as the strongest of motives, which means that Matter Repositors would be used for that, even by such unusually intelligent members of your race as yourself."

"Don't softsoap me," Jerry said angrily. "Not after you just got

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through saying that we Earthlings are nothing but naked savages, compared to the high and mighty super-beings on other planets!"

"I apologize for my phraseology," the Ambassador said. "With my limited command of your language—"

"Your limited command, nuts! I suppose you supermen enjoy seeing us naked savages squirm. Why talk sanctimoniously about the damage you might do, when you know damn well the damage has already been done? Just the news that something as advanced as the Matter Repositor exists has sent unemployment to a new high, and the stock market to a new low. And you theorize about ethics, while denying us the only cure!" Jerry found himself fighting a nearly irresistible impulse to smash his fist into that too-perfect profile—which, he realized glumly, would only prove the Ambassador's point about savages.

"Here, here," the Ambassador said benevolently, "let's have another drink. Then we'll see whether I can make it clear to you why the actual importation of Matter Repositors would cause much more trouble on Earth than the announcement of their existence, bad as the effect of that has been. To begin with, I admit I made a very serious error in mentioning the device at all before the U.N. Assembly. I intended merely to explain how I came here without a spaceship. After that, I was flooded with questions; I could no more avoid answering them than I could courteously avoid answering the questions you've been asking today."

"You mean you super-beings actually admit you're human enough to make mistakes?" Jerry asked, somewhat mollified.

"Of course we make mistakes. We try not to make the same one twice. You see, we once made the mistake of importing Matter Repositors to a planet whose natural resources and social concepts weren't adequate for the device. That was a long time ago, and they haven't recovered from the effects yet. Suppose a consignment of ten thousand Matter Repositors arrived on Earth tomorrow. Under your economic system, who would get them?"

"The ten thousand people or corporations who had the most money to pay for them, I guess. Unless government agencies grabbed 'em."

"Can you guarantee that of the ten thousand people on Earth who have the most money, not one is unscrupulous?"

"Gosh, no!" Jerry said. "I don't think there's any doubt that to stay in business very long, a man or a company has to have a cer-

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tain amount of business ethics. Nobody can gyp the public indefinitely. But a bank robber might have a lot of cash, or a confidence man, or a cluck with a big inheritance."

"So, to be generous, let's assume that 9,999 of your wealthiest persons are so ethical that they would never make any profit at the expense of the general welfare. That leaves us one crook. What would he reposit first?"

"Hmm . . . Maybe the gold at Fort Knox."

"And what effect would that have on Earth's business?"

"I'm not quite sure," Jerry admitted. "I'm no shark on monetary theory, just the kind of large-scale salesman who makes mass production possible. But it certainly wouldn't do the world situation any good."

"Suppose, next, our crook holds the President of the United States for ransom. Since he doesn't need money, the ransom price might be laws which would grant him impunity for his crimes. If not, he could have an accomplice reposit him out of jail, or even out of the electric chair, before the switch was pulled."

"That's enough! I get the idea!" Jerry exclaimed.

"Wait—there's a more important point. Suppose a government you consider the wrong government got hold of some of the machines. First, of course, they'd reposit the world stockpile of atomic bombs. Then they'd reposit disease bacteria into the bloodstreams of U.N. troops, officials, and civilian workers, and reposit all the ammunition out of U.N. guns. So long as there is one spark of nationalism left on Earth, so long as any country has an economic and political system they consider better than some other system, Matter Repositors would mean planetary self-destruction. Now do you see why I was blunt and unqualified?"

"I do," Jerry said solemnly, "And I was a fool to fly off the handle when you called us savages. We *are* savages, I can see that now. And your people must be pretty damned godlike to be trusted with such an invention!"

"Not at all. To a Micronesian bushman, the pilot who can be trusted with the power and speed of a B-29 seems a veritable god. But the pilot is only an ordinary Joe, very likely no more intelligent than the bushman—he just had a different background. Fighting each other for necessities and luxuries, the process that you people call business competition, has so long been needless to our people that they would no more think of competitive gain than you would do an Indian harvest dance before you signed a contract. They aren't necessarily

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more intelligent or more virtuous than your people—they just have a different background."

"You seem to have devoted a lot of study to the larceny in the Earthman's soul," Jerry put in. "What if we stole the secret from you, whether you think it wise to give it to us or not? Suppose somebody swiped the blueprints, or copied a Repositor you brought with you for your own use?"

The Ambassador smiled. "You might *try* to steal it. That's why I didn't bring a Repositor with me, to save you people the trouble of a futile try."

"Why futile?"

"Well, the Matter Repositor is a simple device. Any child on the Federated Planets who had an education, say, equivalent to your technical high school education, could build a working model, even without another Repositor to assist him. But Earth's best technicians couldn't build one, even with either blueprints or a model to copy."

"They couldn't, eh?" Jerry challenged, bristling again. "They managed to split atoms, transmute elements, do a few little tricks like that."

"I see I've been tactless again," the Ambassador said regretfully. "Just now, you readily conceded that Earthmen are savages morally, but when I seem to cast aspersions on your mechanical ability, it offends your racial vanity. All right, let's go back to the B-29 pilot and the intelligent bushman. The internal combustion engine that powers the B-29 is a simple device in fundamental principle, isn't it?"

"Sure," Jerry said.

"Any high school boy who has taken a course in auto mechanics, who has the requisite machine tools, metals, casting equipment, and fuel, could build a working model of an internal combustion engine, couldn't he, even without ready-made parts?"

"If he wasn't all thumbs, he could."

"All right. Now suppose the B-29 is grounded in the jungle. The bushman is examining the engine. He's just as intelligent as the pilot, remember, but his environment hasn't produced an oil well, let alone a refinery. He has never seen a lathe or a micrometer. He has no mine, no smelter. He can't copy that B-29 engine by whittling wood or chipping stone, even if he's a born mechanical genius, and he can't run it on seawater. So he says the plane flies by magic. Put him in the pilot seat, and you'll admit it's practically inevitable that he'll crash."

"Why do you take so much trouble to explain things?" Jerry asked wryly. "I should have my head examined for not under-

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standing it in the first place."

"Let's say I'm feebly trying to make amends for what my unfortunate slip of the tongue has done to your business."

"You've brought me around to your way of thinking, Mr. Ambassador," Jerry said, recovering enough to carry the ball. "But it would be impossible to sell the public on the idea that they shouldn't have Repositors because they're too hot to handle. Statistics on auto accidents never convinced anybody that he didn't want a nice, shiny, new car. Nobody thinks he personally will get killed in traffic — he's too smart. You can't convince a youngster he doesn't want candy before dinner; he thinks he knows better than his parents. But you *can* hide the candy, while putting an appetizing meal on the table."

"Yes, except that I regrettably didn't hide the fact that the Matter Repositor exists."

"You sure didn't. And it puts you on a spot, doesn't it? I don't imagine it will be much fun for you to report to your government that one ill-considered remark, made shortly after your arrival, upset Earth's economy."

For the first time, the Ambassador's suavity was ruffled. Sweat stood out on his noble forehead. "I've been hoping the bad-effects would die down before I have to report," he confessed.

"They won't die down by themselves. You know damned well they're getting worse and worse, as word-of-mouth advertising about the Matter Repositor spreads." Jerry leaned closer. "But you and I can get rid of those bad effects."

"How?"

"Well, I'll tell you. When I came to see you, I was pretty sure you'd turn me down cold on importing Matter Repositors. But I had an ace up my sleeve. I hoped you would admit that the reason you've been stalling on selling Earth any Repositors is that you don't really have a practical one. I thought maybe rumors of the Repositor's powers had been vastly exaggerated. If you admitted that, I intended to publicize it to the limit. A campaign to convince Earthmen that you'd been kidding them would work, because it plays on John Q. Public's conviction that he's pretty smart, too smart to believe all this gab about a gadget he's never seen. With your denial to back me up, I could put it across. It would be a lifesaving shot in the arm for Earth business."

"You mean," the Ambassador said reflectively, "that if I call myself a liar—if I actually become a liar in so doing—I can patch up the damage I've done? That puts me in a difficult ethical position."

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"Not as difficult as the one you're in now. If it will make it easier for you, I can word your denial in a face-saving way, and have it ready for your signature Tuesday. You have a remarkable command of colloquial English, but even a diplomat using his native tongue can't juggle the connotations and inferences like an advertising man."

"It's very kind of you to offer your professional skill in my behalf. I think I should pay you a fee for the copy."

"Skip it," Jerry said generously, fingering the nickel and two pennies in his pocket. "A small token of my appreciation for the patience you've shown. What time Tuesday?"

"Say two o'clock?"

"Fine. But before I spend my time on this, you're not going to make the same deal with somebody else, are you?"

"Deal? Did I make a deal?"

"What I mean, nobody else has approached you with the idea that Earth business would get back to normal if you would deny that a practical Matter Repositor exists? You'd say I have exclusive rights to the idea?"

"Nobody has," the Ambassador said, "and I agree to give you exclusive rights."

"Good! With your signed denial, I can raise the loot. I think the N.A.M. will go for it. The campaign will have to be well-financed, you see; the amount of space the news columns will give to your denial may be as much as they gave to your original statement, but that alone won't do the job. It's much harder to kill a notion that has penetrated the public mind than it is to implant one."

THE Ambassador indulged in a chuckle. "I'm beginning to see daylight. My signed denial in your hands becomes a salable piece of merchandise, worth far more than I would pay you for a few lines of copy. Well, more power to you! Would it be out of place for me to contribute some of the funds for publicizing this denial?"

"How much?" Jerry asked practically.

"Well," the Ambassador explained, "I've had nothing reposited that I could avoid. But since your planet has a monetary exchange, I had to pay for my office help, lodging, and so on. Synthesizing coinage would have been counterfeiting, which is against your laws, so I merely had a moderate amount of uncoined gold reposited, and I sell it on the regular Earth market as I need funds. Gold has no particular value on the Federated Planets, of course. I could get whatever you need, so long as it isn't

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enough to disrupt the economy any more than—well, than I have already. Let's, limit ourselves to an amount that could be accounted for by an unusually good year in mining."

"Sold!" Jerry said happily. "I think I can struggle along on a million a month retainer. Plus the usual fifteen per cent on advertising space and printing, of course; I'll have an estimate on that for you Tuesday. Since you can finance the whole campaign yourself, we'll leave the N.A.M. out of it. That way I can spare you the humiliation of signing an outright denial. All you have to do from now on is to keep mum. Don't even admit that you're the angel financing this campaign; that would make it look phony. I'll assign you three personal public-relations men, on twenty-four-hour shift. All your public remarks are to screen through them."

"But how can I conceal my identity when I'm sponsoring the campaign?" the Ambassador objected.

"That's easy. The ostensible sponsor will be a dummy organization called—um—the Consumers Fact Finding Board. Nobody but me needs to know who signs the checks."

"How long will this campaign continue?"

"I figure it'll take about six months to sell the public this particular bill of goods. Once we get business revived, the best thing is never to mention the words Matter Repositor again, not even to deny its existence. The ultimate goal is to make people forget they ever heard of such a gadget. The more convincing I make it, the quicker I'll work myself out of a job."

"I should think you'd make it last as long as possible; that's why I asked you for a time-limit. Do you *want* to work yourself out of a job?"

"You bet I do! Then I can start selling a bigger item, launch a longer-term promotion, one that will last till Earth gets civilized, till I don't have anything more to sell. From what you say, that will take a lot longer than I'll live."

"It may be none of my business, but what is this big item you propose to sell next?" the Ambassador asked, curiously.

"Earth," Jerry said.

The Ambassador looked confused. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Didn't you just get through telling me, in effect, that any of your people who came to Earth could have all the money they wanted to spend? Well, I'm going to run advertising copy on the Federated Planets, and get them to come here and spend it."

"But I also told you that ad-

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vertising is unknown on the Federated Planets!" the Ambassador protested.

"All the better. Your people, then, will have less sales resistance than an audience of Earth kindergarten kids, who have had spot commercials dinned into their ears since birth. The only problem is space and time."

"The Matter Repositor has effectively solved the problems of space and time."

"No, I mean space and time as an advertising man uses those terms. Newspaper and magazine space, radio and TV time. Do you have any newspapers out there?"

"We have very little you would classify as news. No wars, no stock market, no crime, no epidemics, no political mudslinging, few accidents. But we do have information bulletins, of course."

"Fine! Besides that million a month retainer, I want an exclusive contract to run advertising copy in the information bulletins on the Federated Planets."

"This is completely unprecedented!"

"You want to get out of this mess you're in, don't you? I'm the boy who can get you out, and that's my price."

"You drive a hard bargain, Mr. Jergins. Very well, I'll arrange it. But I'm getting you the contract only because I'm certain your excursion idea won't work. Oh, I know Earthmen want to visit the Federated Planets; I've had plenty of requests. I've had to explain repeatedly that we must hold to our announced policy of no ambassador from Earth, and no exchange students, until Earth has completed a few more steps in the development of her civilization. But surely none of *our* people will come to Earth, aside from a few students of comparative civilizations. Our general public can view samples of your national costumes, automobiles, and so on, in the museums. I can't see why they should want to come here, while Earth is still in a primitive and dangerous stage."

"You can't, eh? Well, you might be surprised, Mr. Ambassador, you might be surprised. For the time being, just picture yourself as the pilot of that B-29, grounded on a primitive little island in space. You've met a poor, ignorant bushman. He couldn't reproduce your plane to save his neck. He can't manufacture a single gadget you'd want to buy. Nevertheless, you're about to see a demonstration of a few tricks of survival that your supercivilized race has forgotten—or, rather, never knew. I think you'll cook up into a right tasty dish."

FOUR days later, the Better Business Bureau of Oskaloosa, Iowa, nabbed a question-

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able character who had accepted deposits from local businessmen, in return for elaborately printed but worthless contracts to deliver Matter Repositors.

The warning flash crossed similar warnings from New Orleans, Reno, Milwaukee, and the Borough of Queens, with a particularly hysterical note injected by Los Angeles, where the populace had proved most susceptible to the bogus agents. The news of a national ring of confidence artists, capitalizing on people's desire for Matter Repositors, ran in all papers, of course. The editors as yet hadn't the faintest idea that they were printing carefully engineered publicity.

Before he even got his space contracts lined up, Jerry had accomplished quite a feat/ He had fixed things so that, if the Ambassador from Outer Space himself had changed his mind, and imported a cargo of genuine Matter Repositors, he would have had some trouble convincing people he wasn't a crook.

In a record two weeks, the campaign proper was ready to roll. It was long on white space, and the copy was so short that, after glancing at it a few times, you found that you had involuntarily committed it to memory. In the center of blank pages in all major metropolitan newspapers appeared a small want-ad, stating that the Consumers Fact Finding Board had deposited with a New York bank the sum of one million dollars in cash, *after taxes*, which would be paid to any person, terrestrial or extraterrestrial, who could produce a Matter Repositor capable of repositing an object weighing two pounds a distance of ten feet.

The offer was repeated daily for a month, and from the second day forward, there was a large, red overprint, looking like a crayon scrawl, which said, "No Takers to Date who Can Deliver the Goods!"

The idea was pounded into the public mind by carcards, billboards, direct mail, and annoying telephone solicitors, who got subscribers out of bathtub and bed to ask them whether they had a Matter Repositor around the house they wanted to sell for a million dollars. Skywriters by day and illuminated blimps by night made sure the literate could not escape the message. Radio and TV singing and cartoon commercials took care of the illiterate.

No conclusions were drawn in the copy. Each "prospect" was left with the comfortable feeling that his own superior intellect and powers of deduction had supplied the answer. No Matter Repositor turned up for sale, so everyone was sure there was no such thing. The whole campaign, like other

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advertising campaigns before it, depended on what people failed to consider. They neglected to realize that a million dollars would be a joke to the owner of a Matter Repositor, who could reposit all the wealth on Earth, including the million in the New York bank, but would have no use for money, since he could reposit usable goods. The magic phrase "a million dollars" was a worldwide symbol for all desirable material things. It would have been almost heresy to reflect that even that much cash had no actual value.

AS Jerry promised, the Ambassador didn't have to issue an official denial. His chief public relations man quite truthfully admitted to reporters that the Ambassador had no Matter Repositor in his possession, a dispatch carried by all wire services, and snickered at by clever columnists.

In basements and garages, persons of good, bad, and indifferent mechanical ability strove to earn the million. The U.S. patent office was inundated with models and drawings of unworkable devices. One of the Duke University subjects tried to patent his ability to influence the fall of dice mentally.

During the next session of the Congress, Jerry's crack lobbyists raised a great howl about the shameful congestion in the Patent Office, not mentioning, of cours that they were employed by the man who had created the congestion, by offering a million dollars for a device he knew no Earthman could build.

Another dummy organization, dubbed the Inventors Protective League, sponsored a bill to amend the act relating to perpetual motion machines. It passed, with an emergency clause, and, thereafter, devices purporting to reposit matter were not entitled to letters of patent.

This just about clinched the deal, for the vast majority of people, who had never watched laws enacted, assumed that if something was in the law, there must be a good reason for it, unless, of course, it was anything like prohibition.

A name band revived "The Thing," leaving the drumbeats out of the vocal refrain, and substituting, "Get out of here with that Matter Repositor, before I call a cop!" Within six months, radio and TV comedians had worn out the joke. Even Goofy, My Friend Irma, Mrs. Ace, and Gracie Allen were too sophisticated to believe in Matter Repositors. Gags about them dropped to the same low level as those about Brooklyn and joke-stealing comics.

Although his appearance in public was liable to start boos and

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catcalls, the Ambassador from Outer Space was duly grateful. He was spared the painful necessity of reporting his disastrous slip of the tongue to his government, for Earth economy was again on the upward spiral. Everybody was spending the money he'd been saving up for a Matter Repositor.

The Ambassador cheerfully paid the million-a-month retainer and the whopping space bills, but Jerry's greatest gain in the transaction was his agreement allowing him to run advertising in the Federated Planets information bulletins. The space didn't cost him a nickel. Yet he knew how to sell his exclusive rights to it for more money than any one Earth company had in its promotional budget.

By the time the campaign debunking the Matter Repositor was ready to die a natural death, Jerry had started an organization of Earth businessmen, spearheaded by the Restaurant and Hotel Associations, and the transportation interests, to promote Earth as a primitive planet. The primitive aspects of Earth, Jerry predicted, would exert a powerful appeal on the citizens of the Federated Planets, who must be pretty bored with civilization, and badly in need of a vaction from too much perfection.

This organization was not composed of dummies, by any means, but the businessmen joined up with a vague idea that their hostelries were to be way-stations, that they were going to promote sightseeing tours to places they themselves would call primitive, that the human exhibits would consist of blanketed Navajos, Chinese coolies, hula girls, Voodoo dancers, and Eskimos.

Jerry filled the biggest convention hall in Chicago, and, at the climax of the proceedings, dramatically drew back a velvet curtain, unveiling a huge painting of the symbol of the campaign—a masked bandit, wearing a slouch hat, clutching in a greedy hand a fat bag marked with a dollar sign. Below was blazoned the tasteful slogan, "Let the People of Earth Gyp You!"

A chorus of outrage echoed in the rafters. It hadn't occurred to the members that primitive exhibit A would be themselves; to wit, the genus Earth businessman; sub-species, go-getter. Jerry emerged from the resulting argument somewhat battered, but with what any experienced advertising man would recognize as a victory. His copy was to run in five per cent of the space, keyed. Now all he had to do was prove in dollars and cents that he knew more about mass sales psychology than his clients, which was, of course, a cinch.

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In spite of translation into a more civilized language, Jerry's five per cent of the space outpulled the tamer ninety-five per cent by better than ten to one. Thereafter, his clients swallowed their pride, voted him a free hand, and contented themselves with raking in the shekels from a steady stream of handsome and rich extraterrestrial tourists.

AFTER Jerry's tourist promotion had been running two years, the U.S. Post Office broke down and printed an issue of three-cent stamps commemorating the influx, showing the goddess Terra with welcoming arms open to the starred heavens. Jerry Jergins, the second advertising man in history to achieve the distinction of having Uncle Sam plug his product on a stamp, thereby entered the most select circles of his chosen profession.

Jerry bought enough of the stamps to paper the walls of his swank and spacious penthouse offices, for the benefit of the swarm of tourists who invaded the place daily during afternoon open-house hours. They all wanted to see an advertising agency; to them, this phenomenon was the essence of that primitive planet, Earth. Jerry had recorded a lecture on primitive Earth customs which issued from concealed loudspeakers, and filled display cases with exhibits of primitive Earth culture, emphasizing the aspects he felt these extraterrestrials would find most exotic.

Considering the fact that Jerry had managed to learn little about the Federated Planets that was not utterly essential to the mechanics of his advertising campaign there, he had done a pretty good job of "getting on the customer's side of the counter." Every tourist Jerry talked to had been conditioned, by some unrevealed but apparently foolproof process, not to repeat the Ambassador's error of mentioning Matter Repositors, or other aspects of life on the Federated Planets that might cause repercussions on Earth. Even tourist children couldn't be bribed with lollypops. Tourists talked a great deal, in fluent idiomatic Earth English, yet somehow said very little.

But Jerry knew at least one thing—he was stirring emotions that lay so deep under layers and layers of civilization that these shining, perfect people hadn't known they were capable of feeling them, until they visited Earth. He was getting under their smooth skins, just as surely as the monotone of a Haitian drumbeat gets under the skin of a New Yorker.

One of the display cases contained the working tools of gang-

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sterism — sawed-off shotguns, blackjacks, a model of a bullet-proof automobile, a news photo of the St. Valentine's Day massacre, a clipping about police payoffs from houses of gambling and prostitution, another about blindness resulting from wood alcohol. The shot-glasses of authentic antique bootleg gin that stood on top the cases were often smelled but never sampled.

The second case showed a chart of fluctuations of the stock market, with an actual operating ticker in the middle. Sections of the tape were much in demand as souvenirs. But the photo of a smashed body of a once-wealthy man who jumped from his office window after losing his fortune caused the most comment. The tourists found it difficult to understand how this man could consider his life less important than his bank balance.

The largest case contained models of war weapons, a lurid painting of Pearl Harbor under aerial attack, another of the Hiroshima mushroom that ushered in the atomic age. There were gas masks, artificial limbs, a photo of a blinded veteran led by a Seeing-Eye dog. The tourists gaped at that exhibit with all the relish of Coney Island crowds visiting wax replicas of famous murder scenes.

And along the entire 40-foot wall of the reception room, a photo-mural of a ragged, depression-era breadline brooded over the sleek heads of the beautifully dressed and elaborately fed tourists.

On his way back to the office after lunch one day, Jerry spied a traffic-stopping cluster of humanity in the street outside one of the city's leading department stores. The crowd was gathered around a paddy-wagon. Never diffident, Jerry elbowed his way through the crush, to see two handsome and once well-groomed gentlemen getting a mussing up from a couple of cops. The suspects, athletic-looking characters, were putting up a good fight, and the policemen didn't like it. As Jerry watched, a billy descended on a well-barbered head, and suspect number one ceased resisting arrest.

Jerry had come into contact with enough extraterrestrials by now so that he knew a tourist when he saw one. The male tourists gave him a violent pain in the neck, but he felt somewhat responsible. He grabbed an elbow of the suspect who remained conscious.

"Give me your name, bud, and I'll bail you out. What happened?"

"Oh, we just took a few things off the counters in that store," the tourist answered. "You're very

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kind, but we have plenty of money for bail, thanks. Or is it a bribe you're supposed to hand them?"

"If you have plenty of money, why in hell didn't you buy the stuff, instead of stealing it?"

"We just thought we'd have a bit of a lark. New experience and all that. When on Earth, do as the Earthmen do."

"A lark!" the biggest policeman grunted. "We'll give you a lark, all right! Get in there, you!" He implemented his command with a well-placed kick in the seat of a pair of expertly tailored pants, boosting the tourist into the paddy-wagon, where his unconscious friend had already been deposited.

The siren screamed, dispersing the crowd in front of the police vehicle, and Jerry went on his way, chuckling. As he passed a hole-in-the-wall bar he knew, he decided to stop for a quick one, to settle the heavy feeling in his stomach that came from eating lobster Newburg for lunch. It wasn't a place where you'd care to take a lady, but they served an honest ounce.

As Jerry pushed through the old-fashioned swinging doors, a burst of sound greeted him. A whiskey baritone was rendering one of the unpublishable versions of "Christopher Columbo," to the accompaniment of a piano tinkle by the hired help. The customer

was obviously from the other side of the tracks—from the other side of the Galaxy, in fact—and he was leaning against the piano for the simple reason that he couldn't stand up.

He wore a well-cut California-style dinner jacket, and after all night and half the day, the white gabardine was no longer white. Several drinks had been spilled on the midnight-blue flannel trousers. Only a magnificent physique distinguished him from the Earth or garden variety of drunk.

Jerry stood up to the bar, and as his eyes became accustomed to

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the dimness, he observed a touching — literally — scene being enacted in the darkest booth. An Earthside racetrack tout, whom Jerry recognized as one of the habitues of the place, had a gorgeous female tourist backed into a corner. She had retreated as far as the wall permitted, but he had long since caught up.

Her jaunty, elbow-length chinchilla cape lay on the wet table. Her exquisitely simple strapless dinner dress of silver lame exposed arms and shoulders that were literally out of this world. The naked effect was relieved only by a diamond, platinum, and emerald choker. Jerry knew, though the racetrack tout probably didn't, that the priceless bauble was Repositor - synthe-

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sized, with an Earth museum piece as a model.

It was a tossup whether the race track tout was more interested in the diamonds or the tempting flesh they adorned. The girl made no attempt to fight him off. The reason for her acquiescence was not far to seek. The glass before her contained the remains of a "Pink Lady," which tastes like an ice-cream soda and kicks like four Kentucky mules.

She moved her left hand to pick up the glass, and Jerry caught the flash of a circlet of channel-set baguette diamonds on the third finger. He concluded that she was the wife of the whiskey baritone. That worthy seemed utterly unconcerned about the whole thing, so why should Jerry interfere?

The racetrack tout left his conquest momentarily, walked over to the bar, handed the bartender a five-spot. Without comment, the bartender took down a key tagged 13 from a hook, and the turf expert pocketed it. There was a dingy sign reading "Hotel" outside; Jerry had always supposed the floors above contained equally dingy furnished rooms.

The beautiful tourist's silver heels mounted the back stairs unsteadily. The tout was half steering her, half supporting her. The man was sober enough to know exactly what he was doing. When she came back down those stairs, she would be minus not only her virtue, but her diamond necklace as well.

"Oh, he knew the world was round-o, that sailors could be found-o," the whiskey baritone sang lustily.

Jerry left the saloon with a bad taste in his mouth. As he passed through the electric-eye doorway of his office suite, he had the impression that the too perfect inhabitants of all the color advertising pages he had turned out in past years had suddenly come to life. Handsome tourists were moving, in chattering groups, from one display case to another.

Their chatter, as usual, gave him few clues. He still harbored a suspicion that on their home planets, these lovely people might be symbiotes in the bodies of lower animals, or loathsome but intellectual worms. But he never had any success when he tried to pump them about whether they were like Earth inhabitants at home, or were issued these magnificent bodies and faces along with their passports to Earth.

His unreasoning dislike of the males was undoubtedly part jealousy, for they were all tall, handsome, well-dressed, and athletic enough to be signed en masse by Hollywood. But the universal utter perfection of limb, features, and complexion was not at all repulsive in the female. It was quite

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decorative to have a whole chorus of toothsome girls in Paris gowns cluttering up the office.

Jerry had never seen one of them use a lipstick, rouge, or an eyebrow pencil. The cosmetic business was one of the few that had not profited from the tourist trade, except insofar as lady tourists bought costly perfumes, and Earthgirls strove to mimic the natural—or unnatural—coloring of the fair visitors. A few tourists brought their children along, and here the firm, rosy, unblemished skin was in its proper element. Tourist children were not one whit more cherubic than well-favored children of Earth.

A guide from the Conducted Tours Company arrived to round up a batch of tourists, for a visit to the local jails, flop-houses, and gambling dens. He announced they would go by bus, and the horrified yet delighted whoops that greeted this news reminded Jerry of a Boston society dowager who had just been invited to ride on a camel.

As the crowd trickled out the doors, a lovely vision in platinum blonde laid a slender hand on Jerry's arm.

"Are you really the man who first thought of inviting us to this quaint and delightful planet?" she gushed.

"I guess I am, lady. How do you like it?"

"Oh, it's so primitive! So elemental! Everybody used to think visiting backward planets was dull and scholarly stuff. It took *you* to show us how thrilling and exciting it can be!"

"I'm glad to hear you say that. Some of the tourists are complaining that Earth isn't as primitive as the Tourist Bureau advertising makes it out to be."

"Oh, you *do* exaggerate a wee, tiny bit, but it's all in good fun, isn't it? On the whole, I'm not disappointed — especially not in the *men!*" She fluttered eyelashes, so long and dark that they looked artificial, at him.

"The men?" Jerry asked blankly.

"Oh, come, come!" the platinum blonde breathed throatily into his ear. "Don't pretend to be so innocent! You must have heard of the simply *terrific* reputation Earthmen have acquired on other planets as masterful lovers!"

"It's news to me," Jerry admitted, "but it sounds like a good drawing card. I'll try to work something like that into our ads."

"Always thinking about business, aren't you? Why don't you think of something else, for a change? Me, for instance. Don't you feel a little bit sorry for a girl like me, with nothing but perfectly civilized men to go home to?" the girl pouted invitingly.

Jerry found himself, by imper-

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ceptible stages, being backed into a corner. Well, well, he thought. Perhaps he'd been too harsh in judging that racetrack tout.

"Since you mention it," Jerry said, "I'm not averse to playing the role of Galactic beachboy."

"What does a beachboy do?"

"I'd blush to explain it verbally to a girl unaccustomed to primitive Earth customs, but I'm pretty good at sign language. How about dinner tonight?"

"Well . . . if you'll let me pay the check. I do *so* adore this amazing Earth custom of exchanging food for little slips of paper."

"The pleasure is all yours, sister. See you at the Ritz main dining room — eight o'clock. Soup and fish. Afterward, we'll look at my photo-murals. Now toddle along, baby, if you want to catch the bus to see those hoboes."

Jerry was walking on the Milky Way. Aside from the profits, this job had its esthetic side, he decided. His exuberance was slightly dampened by the grim expression on his secretary's face.

"A very important man has been waiting to see you," she said disapprovingly. "I sent him into your office. The least I could do was put him where he wouldn't have to smell all the perfume these brazen tourist women use. It's enough to make a person ill!"

In the visitor's chair before Jerry's mother-of-pearl inlaid desk, the Ambassador from Outer Space was waiting, staring morosely at the endlessly repeated welcoming goddess Terra on Jerry's wall stamp collection.

"Well, as I live and breathe!" Jerry exclaimed, "a real, live B-29 pilot! Welcome to my humble grass shack! Scotch? Cigar? What can I do for you?"

"You can put out your bonfire, cannibal," the Ambassador said, gruffly. "I think I've stewed enough."

"Why are you tough, then?" Jerry asked. "At me, I mean. I thought I was your best friend in this here jungle. Didn't I do you a favor once, Mr. Ambassador?"

"A *favor?* I paid you well for it! Not only in money, but by getting advertising space for your precious Tourist Bureau on the Federated Planets. I never thought it would lead to this!"

"You thought my copy wouldn't pull, eh? Not even after I'd demonstrated I could make Earth opinion do a flip-flop on that Matter Repositor deal?"

"Oh, I was quite sure you could manipulate Earthmen. That's your job. But I didn't believe our people would respond in such numbers to an appeal to primitive emotions!"

"You weren't alone in that," Jerry said smugly. "Some very prominent members of our or-

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ganization wanted to make the campaign more civilized. I showed them where they were wrong. Can't you see that your people are fed up with civilization, right up to their pretty white necks? The very essence of Earth's appeal to them is that a trip here gives them a chance to relax their ethics, to play at going native."

"Don't rub it in!" The Ambassador shuddered.

"It's nothing new. Tourists have always kicked up their heels. Guess what I saw while I was out to lunch. The cops grabbed a couple of your boys for shoplifting! They thought it was such fun to ride in the paddy-wagon. Back home, of course, they wouldn't think of repositing anything they weren't supposed to, but on Earth it's different."

"And for monkeyshines like that," the Ambassador growled, "I am driven half crazy working out sleep-record courses. *'Idioms of Earth English'—'What Not to Say on Backward Planets and Why' — 'Earth Fashion Guide, What You Can Buy There and What to Reposit.'* Bah! I'm supposed to be a diplomat, not a fashion adviser!"

"Why don't you hire some help?" Jerry suggested.

"I have. I've hired a whole staff, with offices in all major Earth cities, to exchange platinum, bullion, and precious stones for Earth currencies. It's a man-sized job, I can tell you, to keep Earth currencies stable under this load!"

"You're doing a very good job," Jerry said, soothingly.

"You know what one of our citizens asked me yesterday? *How she could get a marriage license!* Your officials had turned her down, because she'd been conditioned not to mention her birthplace and age. Mind you, a citizen of the Federated Planets wanted to marry an Earthman and live on this raw, Galactic frontier the rest of her life! Why, we don't even know whether the races can cross-breed!"

"That should be looked into," Jerry agreed.

"What are you trying to do?" the Ambassador demanded. "Drag the citizens of the Federated Planets down to the level of your jungle? You blithely assume those two shoplifters can be trusted with Matter Repositors when they get back home, but I'm not so sure. We haven't any jails to toss them into, but we may have to establish some. Matter-Repositor-proof jails!"

"That's your problem," Jerry said. "All I'm trying to do is make some money for myself and other businessmen on Earth. Which I'm doing, thank you. And I doubt that you could stop me, at this point. Your citizens would

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raise quite a howl if my ads stopped appearing in the information bulletins."

"Money!" the Ambassador exclaimed, "All you Earthmen think about is money!" He leaned over Jerry's desk. "What if you could reposit the money—the gold, that is—without all the work you have to put into entertaining these tourists?"

"Hmm," Jerry said, thinking of his date for that evening, and other equally lovely tourists. "Money isn't the only thing in life. And don't forget the income tax. I've got to have some deductible expenses."

"Knowing you, I'd bet you could figure out some way of handling that little detail."

"What's your proposition?"

"Two years ago, you came to my office, wanting to import Matter Repositors. I told you Earth's civilization wasn't ready for them."

"We still aren't, according to what you say, about our avaricious instincts."

"No, you're not. But you have methods of manipulating public opinion and attitudes that are far more advanced than those found on other planets."

"So you admit that Earth is advanced in *something!*" Jerry said happily.

"How would you like to have the name of Jerry Jergins go down in your history as the originator of the most significant public-relations campaign ever undertaken on this planet?" the Ambassador asked, temptingly. "You can handle it, if any man on Earth can."

"Softsoaping me again! What's the campaign? I'll listen to it, but I don't know whether I'll buy it."

"Your job would be to get Earth's psychology and sociology ready for the Matter Repositor."

Jerry reflected. "You mean I'd have to eliminate war, supplement the Voice of America, and so on? I'd have certain advantages over the Voice of America, at that. I wouldn't have a bunch of politicians playing football with my appropriations."

"This campaign would have to go further and deeper than the Voice of America. You might call it the Voice of Conscience. Its aim would be to make every human being on Earth care more about the welfare of his fellow-man than he cares about his own."

"A couple of thousand years back," Jerry said, soberly, "a better Promoter than I tried to put that idea across. The campaign He started is still running. It's taken hold in some quarters, but I wouldn't say public acceptance is anything like worldwide yet."

"Then you don't think you can do it?" the Ambassador asked, his eagerness somewhat deflated.

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"I'm not committing myself to whether I could or couldn't. I could put the Ten Commandments on an international hookup. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor his goods. I could get Walt Disney to dramatize the golden rule."

"Ah, I see you have some ideas for the copy already," the Ambassador said. "I thought I could get you interested in it. Then you'll sign a contract?"

"No," Jerry said, briefly and definitely.

"Now, wait a minute, Mr. Jergins," the Ambassador protested. "Why do you suddenly become blunt and unqualified? Do you realize what I'm offering you? In return for ceasing this tourist promotion, I'm offering you the invention that obsolesces all others —the Matter Repositor!"

Jerry stood up and placed the palms of his hands flat on his desk. "I told you that you'd learn something in our primitive jungle, Mr. Ambassador. Well, this is it. We may be mechanical morons, according to your standards, but we naked savages can produce anything we need. Since we've corrected the misconception that what Earth produces isn't good enough for Earthmen, and whipped up a tourist trade, business is booming. And when it booms, we can distribute those Earth products in a way that suits us pretty well. A primitive way, you may think, but one that is adapted to the unfortunate circumstance that we aren't a bunch of little tin saints living in an ideal world.

"I asked you for Matter Repositors once, and you were wise enough to turn me down. I'm glad you did. They'd cause us more trouble than the atomic bomb. We don't want the damn things. Do *you* understand *that?*"

On sudden impulse, Jerry strode across his office. There stood a large and brilliantly colored object, jarring oddly with the other furniture. Sometimes at a loss to spend his newly acquired wealth, Jerry had yielded, a month or so before, to a desire conceived in childhood to own a real honest-to-goodness juke box.

Jerry fished in his pocket for a nickel, deposited it in the slot, pushed button seven. Loud, tinny, and offensively blatant, the strains of "I Don't Wanna Leave the Congo" filled the office, effectively drowning out any further remarks the Ambassador from Outer Space might have wished to make.

"If you'll pardon me," Jerry shouted over the din, "I have some arrow heads to chip—and a potential extraterrestrial mate to woo with a quaint tribal ritual we call dating on Earth."

—SYLVIA JACOBS

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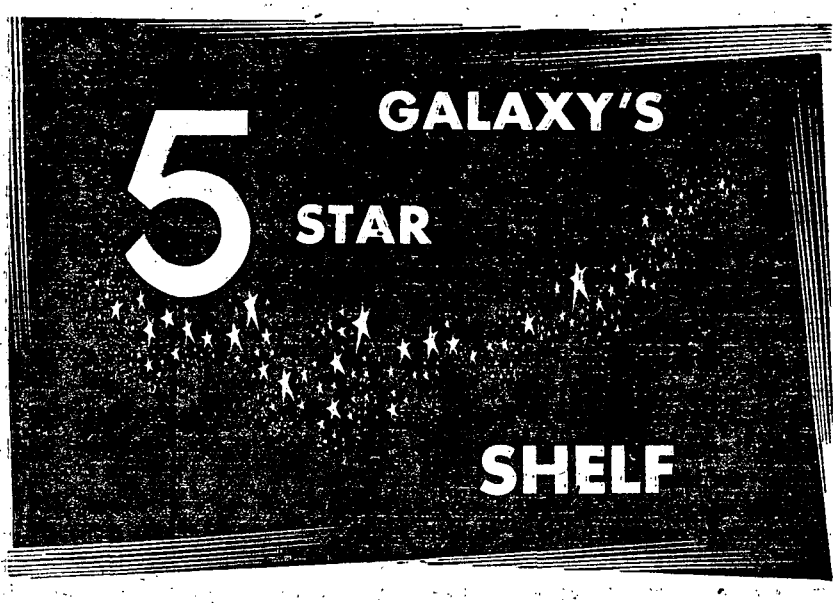

RENAISSANCE, by Raymond F. Jones. Gnome Press, New York, 1951. 255 *pages,* $2.75

PEOPLE say the book's obscure. It's not scientific. It's pontifical. Its style's too purple. In general, I'm nuts for liking it. Maybe I am.

We have a postulated world parallel to Earth. It is called Kronweld, and is one of millions of different parallel worlds. People and things can be transferred to it with the aid of great machines.

Many centuries after the Nth World War, techniques are developed whereby all babies testing potentially brilliant in learning are sent to this parallel world in an effort to preserve them from the savageries on Earth.

After still more centuries, these Great Brains have become slaves of scientific superstitions, while on Earth the ignorant masses are the slaves of arrogant masters known as the Statists, who also control access to Kronweld and are planning to destroy the latter to prevent the scientists from ever returning and destroying them.

However, there are rebels both on Earth and on Kronweld, who oppose the superstition-ridden scientists as well as the Statists.

This is not science fiction of

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tomorrow. It is a never-never science fiction — but combined with it is an almost painfully real and immediate message which is not fiction at all. The message: If people don't get together on a free and peaceful basis pretty soon, there'll be no more people to get together.

But the message never gets in the way. You may have to hunt for it, in fact, while reading about the civilization of scientists in which there are no sciences of biology, botany or zoology and no arts and practices of medicine or surgery; and in which the search of scientists for certitudes is exposed as merely an abdication of scientific responsibility, which is — never assume that *anything* is eternally true!

THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS, by John Wyndham. Doubleday and Co., New York, 1951. 222 *pages,* $2.50.

ONE of the minor miracles connected with this *Collier's* serial by science fiction's old British friend, John Beynon Harris, is the fact that anyone familiar with the Harris of the early '30s will wonder how the Harris of the '50s could have learned how to write in so workmanlike a fashion.

As a story, the current opus is what you'd call a good run-of-the-mill affair, not the worst by any means, but also not the best, of the long literature of World Catastrophe tales.

It deals with the invention (or development) of some horrid Triffids, and the coincidental occurrence of a display of incredible h e a v e n l y fireworks all around the world that makes everyone who looked at them permanently blind.

Conflict: the struggles of the tiny handful of those who did *not* see the fireworks, and who consequently still have vision, to survive the combined horrors of great gobs of people dying all over the place, and great masses of sentient vegetables trying to attack all humans they can lay their poisonous "whips" on.

The coincidence is not quite as great as it sounds, since "Wyndham" suggests that the phenomena are secret war weapons — the Triffids are escapees from a Russian botanical laboratory, the fireworks the result of a cosmic accident to one of the "Earth satellite vehicles" which the competing Great Powers have thrown up above the atmosphere in swift death orbits.

Oh, well, it hasn't happened yet. Meanwhile, you will find some pleasant reading in this book, provided you aren't out hunting science fiction masterpieces.

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TIME AND AGAIN by Clifford Simak. Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, 1951. 231 *pages,* $2.50.

THIS is one of those complex, sometimes obscure and enormously inventive stories, in the same general tradition as *Renaissance,* that seems most characteristic of the best modern science fiction. Though in some ways not as effective as the Jones novel, it still is an enormously impressive job as GALAXY readers who read it under its serialized name of *Time Quarry* will remember.

Like so much good modern science fiction, Simak's new book is based on some real, honest, practical ethical thinking. It is an *idea* book.

Asher Sutton, the protagonist, has been completely remade by the strange beings of a planet circling round Cygni 61, many light years from Earth. He has learned a new sort of living and has become a new sort of person —not a true "superman" as we understand it, but *different*—as a result of what these "symbiotic abstractions" did to him.

He terms his new attitude not a religion but something he calls "Destiny," and the major premise of his philosophy is: "Nothing living walks alone," thus describing the essential oneness and equality of all sentience.

From the future come several competing forces that are warring among themselves (*time* is their battlefield!) in an effort to change the course of Asher Sutton's future. It seems that he will write a book on his ideas. It will completely change the direction of our intergalactic progress.

One future group wants the book and the democratic, equalitarian future unchanged. Another group wants to kill Sutton before he writes the book, thus completely eliminating his influence. A third group wants to "buy" him and make him change his message to read "Nothing *human*" rather than "Nothing *living*"—naturally a complete abandonment of the original credo.

The development of this rich idea will keep the reader on the edge of his seat, provided he is not looking for (a) wild and woolly cops-and-robbers stuff; (b) Buck Rogers; (c) S-x; and (d) comic-book literary style. It has none of those.

An unfortunate cavil must be put in about the ending. The last page Simak wrote for the GALAXY version has been replaced with his original conclusion. The one he uses in the novel literally reverses the whole intent and meaning of his book—a shocking piece of backing down which leaves the reader convinced that Simak, after all, thinks his hero Asher Sutton is a dangerous fool

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and an idealistic crackpot. Not a very courageous way of ending an otherwise courageous novel.

—And now let me introduce the Guest Reviewer of the Month, Willy Ley. The book Mr. Ley reviews for me is one which, to speak frankly, he is ten thousand times more competent to understand than I.

INTERPLANETARY FLIGHT, An Introduction to Astronautics, by Arthur C. Clarke. Harper & Bros., New York, 1951. 164 *pages,* $2.50.

IF you ever took an instruction course of the forced draft type, where you learned a great number of things in a minimum of time, you'll probably be reminded of this course when you read the book published by the Assistant Secretary of the British Interplanetary Society.

Within his 164 pages, Arthur C. Clarke includes the larger portion of space travel theory. He does *not* discuss space travel problems as an engineer who wants to suggest possible solutions to specific points. He approaches them from the point of view of the astronomer who knows his gravitational fields and his orbits, and describes what *has* to be accomplished before interplanetary flight can be undertaken.

Consequently, there is very little about present-day rockets in this book—just a few highlights to show how far "the art" has progressed during a short quarter century. Beyond them, the book is entirely devoted to the basic requirements of space travel, especially the Earth-Moon trip.

Don't, if you should open the book at random in a store, be frightened by an occasional equation. They are all quite simple and moreover fully explained. Some mathematical argument, also quite simple, is condensed in an appendix. There are several interesting charts and some fine photographs.

In short, if you want to know more about space travel than you can extract from the typical space opera, this is the book to read. Because it is both short and condensed, you'll probably read it more than once—and if you do, you will then find out how many interesting items slipped by you on first reading.

—WILLY LEY

Thanks, Willy. I'd take your advice and read the book at once if it wasn't for the fact that my mother was scared by a quadratic equation when I was minus six months old, and I've had psychological problems with algebra ever since.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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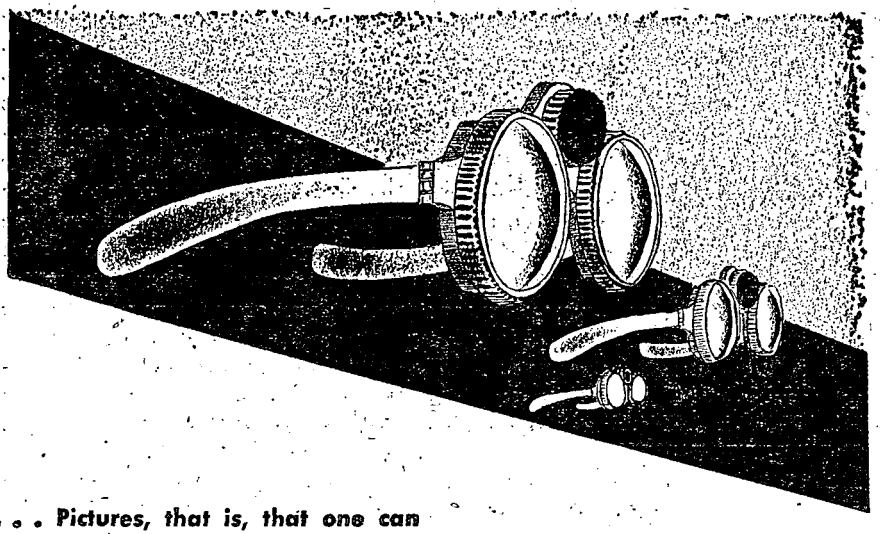

. . . Pictures, that is, that one can test and measure. And these pictures positively, absolutely could not lie!

pictures

Illustrated by MARTIN SCHNEIDER

THE man from the *News* asked, "What do you think of the aliens, Mister Nathen? Are they friendly? Do they look human?"

"Very human," said the thin young man.

Outside, rain sleeted across the big windows with a steady faint drumming, blurring and dimming the view of the airfield where *they* would arrive. On the concrete runways, the puddles were pockmarked with rain, and the

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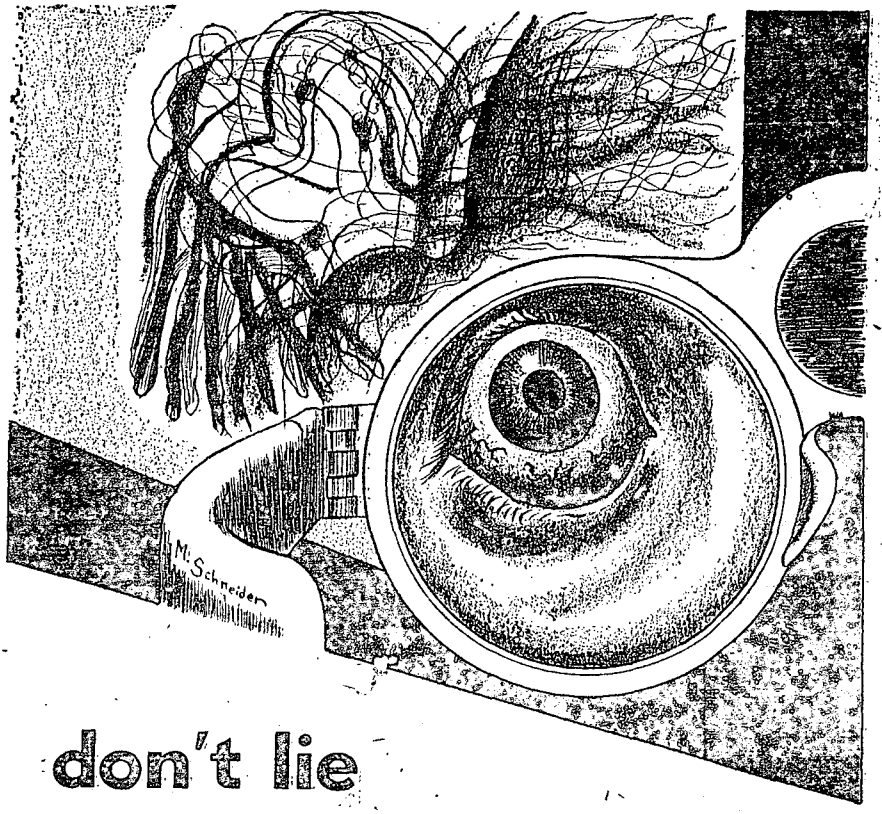

don't lie

By KATHERINE MacLEAN

grass growing untouched between the runways of the unused field glistened wetly, bending before gusts of wind.

Back at a respectful distance from where the huge spaceship would land were the gray shapes of trucks, where TV camera crews huddled inside their mobile units, waiting. Farther back in the deserted sandy landscape, behind distant sandy hills, artillery was ringed in a great circle, and in the distance across the horizon,

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bombers stood ready at airfields, guarding the world against possible treachery from the first alien ship ever to land from space.

"Do you know anything about their home planet?" asked the man from *Herald.*

The *Times* man stood with the others, listening absently, thinking of questions, but reserving them. Joseph R. Nathen, the thin young man with the straight black hair and the tired lines on his face, was being treated with respect by his interviewers. He was obviously on edge, and they did not want to harry him with too many questions to answer at once. They wanted to keep his good will. Tomorrow he would be one of the biggest celebrities ever to appear in headlines.

"No, nothing directly."

"Any ideas or deductions?" *Herald* persisted.

"Their world must be Earth-like to them," the weary-looking young man answered uncertainly. "The environment evolves the animal. But only in relative terms, of course." He looked at them with a quick glance and then looked away evasively, his lank black hair beginning to cling to his forehead with sweat. "That doesn't necessarily mean anything."

"Earthlike," muttered a reporter, writing it down as if he had noticed nothing more in the reply.

The *Times* man glanced at the *Herald,* wondering if he had noticed, and received a quick glance in exchange.

The *Herald* asked Nathen, "You think they are dangerous, then?"

It was the kind of question, assuming much, which usually broke reticence and brought forth quick facts—when it hit the mark. They all knew of the military precautions, although they were not supposed to know.

The question missed. Nathen glanced out the window vaguely. "No, I wouldn't say so."

"You think they are friendly, then?" said the *Herald,* equally positive on the opposite tack.

A fleeting smile touched Nathen's lips. "Those I know are."

There was no lead in this direction, and they had to get the basic facts of the story before the ship came. The *Times* asked, "What led up to your contacting them?"

Nathen answered after a hesitation. "Static. Radio static. The Army told you my job, didn't they?"

THE Army had told them nothing at all. The officer who had conducted them in for the interview stood glowering watchfully, as if he objected by instinct to telling anything to the public.

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Nathen glanced at him doubtfully. "My job is radio decoder for the Department of Military Intelligence. I use a directional pickup, tune in on foreign bands, record any scrambled or coded messages I hear, and build automatic decoders and descramblers for all the basic scramble patterns."

The officer cleared his throat, but said nothing.

The reporters smiled, noting that down.

Security regulations had changed since arms inspection had been legalized by the U.N. Complete information being the only public security against secret rearmament, spying and prying had come to seem a public service. Its aura had changed. It was good public relations to admit to it.

Nathen continued, "I started directing the pickup at stars in my spare time. There's radio noise from stars, you know. Just stuff that sounds like spatter static, and an occasional squawk. People have been listening to it for a long time, and researching, trying to work out why stellar radiation on those bands comes in such jagged bursts. It didn't seem natural."

He paused and smiled uncertainly, aware that the next thing he would say was the thing that would make him famous — an idea that had come to him while he listened—an idea as simple and as perfect as the one that came to Newton when he saw the apple fall.

"I decided it wasn't natural. I tried decoding it."

Hurriedly he tried to explain it away and make it seem obvious. "You see, there's an old intelligence trick, speeding up a message on a record until it sounds just like that, a short squawk of static, and then broadcasting it. Undergrounds use it. I'd heard that kind of screech before."

"You mean they broadcast at us in code?" asked the *News*.

"It's not exactly code. All you need to do is record it and slow it down. They're not broadcasting at us. If a star has planets, inhabited planets, and there is broadcasting between them, they would send it on a tight beam to save power." He looked for comprehension. "You know, like a spotlight. Theoretically, a tight beam can go on forever without losing power. But aiming would be difficult from planet to planet. You can't expect a beam to stay on target, over such distances, more than a few seconds at a time. So they'd naturally compress each message into a short half-second or one-second-length package and send it a few hundred times in one long blast to

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make sure it is picked up during the instant the beam swings across the target."

He was talking slowly and carefully, remembering that this explanation was for the newspapers. "When a stray beam swings through our section of space, there's a sharp peak in noise level from that direction. The beams are swinging to follow their own planets at home, and the distance between there and here exaggerates the speed of swing tremendously, so we wouldn't pick up more than a bip as it passes."

"How do you account for the number of squawks coming in?" the *Times* asked. "Do stellar systems rotate on the plane of the Galaxy?" It was a private question; he spoke impulsively from interest and excitement.

The radio decoder grinned, the lines of strain vanishing from his face for a moment. "Maybe we're intercepting everybody's telephone calls, and the whole Galaxy is swarming with races that spend all day yacking at each other over the radio. Maybe the human type is standard model."

"It would take something like that," the *Times* agreed. They smiled at each other.

The *News* asked, "How did you happen to pick up television instead of voices?"

"Not by accident," Nathan explained patiently. "I'd recognized a scanning pattern, and I wanted pictures. Pictures are understandable in any language."

NEAR the interviewers, a Senator paced back and forth, muttering his memorized speech of welcome and nervously glancing out the wide streaming windows into the gray sleeting rain.

Opposite the windows of the long room was a small raised platform flanked by the tall shapes of TV cameras and sound pickups on booms, and darkened floodlights, arranged and ready for the Senator to make his speech of welcome to the aliens and the world. A shabby radio sending set stood beside it without a case to conceal its parts, two cathode television tubes flickering nakedly on one side and the speaker humming on the other. A vertical panel of dials and knobs jutted up before them and a small hand-mike sat ready on the table before the panel. It was connected to a boxlike, expensively cased piece of equipment with "Radio Lab, U.S. Property" stenciled on it.

"I recorded a couple of package screeches from Sagittarius and began working on them," Nathen added. "It took a couple of months to find the synchronizing signals and set the scanners close enough to the right time to even get a pattern. When I show-

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ed the pattern to the Department, they gave me full time to work on it, and an assistant to help. It took eight months to pick out the color bands, and assign them the right colors, to get anything intelligible on the screen."

THE shabby-looking mess of exposed parts was the original receiver that they had labored over for ten months, adjusting and readjusting to reduce the maddening rippling plaids of unsynchronized color scanners to some kind of sane picture.

"Trial and error," said Nathen, "but it came out all right. The wide band-spread of the squawks had suggested color TV from the beginning."

He walked over and touched the set. The speaker bipped slightly and the gray screen flickered with a flash of color at the touch. The set was awake and sensitive, tuned to receive from the great interstellar spaceship which now circled the atmosphere.

"We wondered why there were so many bands, but when we got the set working, and started recording and playing everything that came in, we found we'd tapped something like a lending library line. It was all fiction, plays."

Between the pauses in Nathen's voice, the *Times* found himself unconsciously listening for the sound of roaring, swiftly approaching rocket jets.

The *Post* asked, "How did you contact the spaceship?"

"I scanned and recorded a film copy of *Rite of Spring*, the Disney-Stravinsky combination, and sent it back along the same line we were receiving from. Just testing. It wouldn't get there for a good number of years, if it got there at all, but I thought it would please the library to get a new record in.

"Two weeks later, when we caught and slowed a new batch of recordings, we found an answer. It was obviously meant for us. It was a flash of the Disney being played to a large audience, and then the audience sitting and waiting before a blank screen. The signal was very clear and loud. We'd intercepted a spaceship. They were asking for an encore, you see. They liked the film and wanted more . . ."

He smiled at them in sudden thought. "You can see them for yourself. It's all right down the hall where the linguists are working on the automatic translator."

The listening officer frowned and cleared his throat, and the thin young man turned to him quickly. "No security reason why they should not see the broadcasts, is there? Perhaps you should show them." He said to

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the reporters reassuringly, "It's right down the hall. You will be informed the moment the spaceship approaches."

The interview was very definitely over. The lank-haired, nervous young man turned away and seated himself at the radio set while the officer swallowed his objections and showed them dourly down the hall to a closed door.

They opened it and fumbled into a darkened room crowded with empty folding chairs, dominated by a glowing bright screen. The door closed behind them, bringing total darkness.

There was the sound of reporters fumbling their way into seats around him, but the *Times* man remained standing, aware of an enormous surprise, as if he had been asleep and wakened to find himself in the wrong country.

The bright colors of the double image seemed the only real thing in the darkened room. Even blurred as they were, he could see that the action was subtly different, the shapes subtly not right.

He was looking at aliens.

THE impression was of two humans disguised, humans moving oddly, half-dancing, half-crippled. Carefully, afraid the images would go away, he reached up to his breast pocket, took out his polarized glasses, rotated one lens at right angles to the other and put them on.

Immediately, the two beings came into sharp focus, real and solid, and the screen became a wide, illusively near window through which he watched them.

They were conversing with each other in a gray-walled room, discussing something with restrained excitement. The large man in the green tunic closed his purple eyes for an instant at something the other said, and grimaced, making a motion with his fingers as if shoving something away from him.

Mellerdrammer.

The second, smaller, with yellowish-green eyes, stepped closer, talking more rapidly in a lower voice. The first stood very still, not trying to interrupt.

Obviously, the proposal was some advantageous treachery, and he wanted to be persuaded. The *Times* groped for a chair and sat down.

Perhaps gesture is universal; desire and aversion, a leaning forward or a leaning back, tension, relaxation. Perhaps these actors were masters. The scenes changed, a corridor, a parklike place in what he began to realize was a spaceship, a lecture room. There were others talking and working, speaking to the man in the green tunic, and never was it unclear

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what was happening or how they felt.

They talked a flowing language with many short vowels and shifts of pitch, and they gestured in the heat of talk, their hands moving with an odd lagging difference of motion, not slow, but somehow drifting.

He ignored the language, but after a time the difference in motion began to arouse his interest. Something in the way they walked . . .

With an effort he pulled his mind from the plot and forced his attention to the physical difference. Brown hair in short silky crew cuts, varied eye colors, the colors showing clearly because their irises were very large, their round eyes set very widely apart in tapering light-brown faces. Their necks and shoulders were thick in a way that would indicate unusual strength for a human, but their wrists were narrow and their fingers long and thin and delicate.

There seemed to be more than the usual number of fingers.

Since he came in, a machine had been whirring and a voice muttering beside him. He called his attention from counting their fingers and looked around. Beside him sat an alert-looking man wearing earphones, watching and listening with hawklike concentration. Beside him was a tall streamlined box. From the screen came the sound of the alien language. The man abruptly flipped a switch on the box, muttered a word into a small hand-microphone and flipped the switch back with nervous rapidity.

He reminded the *Times* man of the earphoned interpreters at the UN. The machine was probably a vocal translator and the mutterer a linguist adding to its vocabulary. Near the screen were two other linguists taking notes.

THE *Times* remembered the Senator pacing in the observatory room, rehearsing his speech of welcome. The speech would not be just the empty pompous gesture he had expected. It would be translated mechanically and understood by the aliens.

On the other side of the glowing window that was the stereo screen, the large protagonist in the green tunic was speaking to a pilot in a gray uniform. They stood in a brightly lit canary-yellow control room in a spaceship.

The *Times* tried to pick up the thread of the plot. Already he was interested in the fate of the hero, and liked him. That was the effect of good acting, probably, for part of the art of acting is to win affection from the audience, and this actor might be the matinee

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idol of whole solar systems.

Controlled tension, betraying itself by a jerk of the hands, a too-quick answer to a question. The uniformed one, not suspicious, turned his back, busying himself at some task involving a map lit with glowing red points, his motions sharing the same fluid dragging grace of the others, as if they were underwater, or on a slow motion film. The other was watching a switch, a switch set into a panel, moving closer to it, talking casually — background music coming and rising in thin chords of tension.

There was a closeup of the alien's face watching the switch, and the *Times* noted that his ears were symmetrically half-circles, almost perfect with no earholes visible. The voice of the uniformed one answered, a brief word in a preoccupied deep voice. His back was still turned. The other glanced at the switch, moving closer to it, talking casually, the switch coming closer and closer stereoscopically. It was in reach, filling the screen. His hand came into view, darting out, closed over the switch—

There was a sharp clap of sound and his hand opened in a frozen shape of pain. Beyond him, as his gaze swung up, stood the figure of the uniformed officer, unmoving, a weapon rigid in his hand, in the startled position in which he had turned and fired, watching with widening eyes as the man in the green tunic swayed and fell.

The tableau held, the uniformed one drooping, looking down at his hand holding the weapon which had killed, and music began to build in from the background. Just for an instant, the room and the things within it flashed into one of those bewildering color changes which were the bane of color television, and switched to a color negative of itself, a green man standing in a violet control room, looking down at the body of a green man in a red tunic. It held for less than a second; then the color band alternator fell back into phase and the colors reversed to normal.

Another uniformed man came and took the weapon from the limp hand of the other, who began to explain dejectedly in a low voice while the music mounted and covered his words and the screen slowly went blank, like a window that slowly filmed over with gray fog.

The music faded.

In the dark, someone clapped appreciatively.

The earphoned man beside the *Times* shifted his earphones back from his ears and spoke briskly. "I can't get any more. Either of you want a replay?"

There was a short silence un-

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til the linguist nearest the set said, "I guess we've squeezed that one dry. Let's run the tape where Nathen and that ship radio boy are kidding around CQing and tuning their beams in closer. I have a hunch the boy is talking routine ham talk and giving the old radio count—one-two-three-testing."

There was some fumbling in the semi-dark and then the screen came to life again.

IT showed a flash of an audience sitting before a screen and gave a clipped chord of some familiar symphony. "Crazy about Stravinsky and Mozart," remarked the earphoned linguist to the *Times*, resettling his earphones. "Can't stand Gershwin. Can you beat that?" He turned his attention back to the screen as the right sequence came on.

The *Post*, who was sitting just in front of him, turned to the *Times* and said, "Funny how much they look like people." He was writing, making notes to telephone his report. "What color hair did that character have?"

"I didn't notice." He wondered if he should remind the reporter that Nathen had said he assigned the color bands on guess, choosing the colors that gave the most plausible images. The guests, when they arrived, could turn out to be bright green with blue hair. Only the gradations of color in the picture were sure, only the similarities and contrasts, the relationship of one color to another.

From the screen came the sound of the alien language again. This race averaged deeper voices than human. He liked deep voices. Could he write that?

No, there was something wrong with that, too. How had Nathen established the right sound-track pitch? Was it a matter of taking the modulation as it came in, or some sort of hetrodyning up and down by trial and error? Probably.

It might be safer to assume that Nathen had simply preferred deep voices.

As he sat there, doubting, an uneasiness he had seen in Nathen came back to add to his own uncertainty, and he remembered just how close that uneasiness had come to something that looked like restrained fear.

"What I don't get is why he went to all the trouble of picking up TV shows instead of just contacting them," the *News* complained. "They're good shows, but what's the point?"

"Maybe so we'd get to learn their language too," said the *Herald*.

On the screen now was the obviously unstaged and genuine scene of a young alien working

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over a bank of apparatus. He turned and waved and opened his mouth in the comical O shape which the *Times* was beginning to recognize as their equivalent of a smile, then went back to trying to explain something about the equipment, in elaborate awkward gestures and carefully mouthed words.

The *Times* got up quietly, went out into the bright white stone corridor and walked back the way he had come, thoughtfully folding his stereo glasses and putting them away.

No one stopped him. Secrecy restrictions were ambiguous here. The reticence of the Army seemed more a matter of habit, mere reflex, from the fact that it had all originated in the Intelligence Department, than any reasoned policy of keeping the landing a secret.

The main room was more crowded than he had left it. The TV camera and sound crew stood near their apparatus, the Senator had found a chair and was reading, and at the far end of the room eight men were grouped in a circle of chairs, arguing something with impassioned concentration. The *Times* recognized a few he knew personally, eminent names in science, workers in field theory.

A stray phrase reached him: "—reference to the universal constants as ratio—" It was probably a discussion of ways of converting formulas from one mathematics to another for a rapid exchange of information.

They had reason to be intent, aware of the flood of insights that novel viewpoints could bring, if they could grasp them. He would have liked to go over and listen, but there was too little time left before the spaceship was due, and he had a question to ask.

THE hand-rigged transceiver was still humming, tuned to the sending band of the circling ship, and the young man who had started it all was sitting on the edge of the TV platform with his chin resting in one hand. He did not look up as the *Times* approached, but it was the indifference of preoccupation, not discourtesy.

The *Times* sat down on the edge of the platform beside him and took out a pack of cigarettes, then remembered the coming TV broadcast and the ban on smoking. He put them away, thoughtfully watching the diminishing rain spray against the streaming windows.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Nathen showed that he was aware and friendly by a slight motion of his head.

"*You* tell me."

"Hunch," said the *Times* man.

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"Sheer hunch. Everything sailing along too smoothly, everyone taking too much for granted."

Nathen relaxed slightly. "I'm still listening."

"Something about the way they move . . ."

Nathen shifted to glance at him.

"That's bothered me, too."

"Are you sure they're adjusted to the right speed?"

Nathen clenched his hands out in front of him and looked at them consideringly. "I don't know. When I turn the tape faster, they're all rushing, and you begin to wonder why their clothes don't stream behind them, why the doors close so quickly and yet you can't hear them slam, why things fall so fast. If I turn it slower, they all seem to be swimming." He gave the *Times* a considering sidewise glance. "Didn't catch the name."

Country-bred guy, thought the *Times*. "Jacob Luke, *Times*," he said, extending his hand.

Nathen gave the hand a quick, hard grip, identifying the name. "Sunday Science Section editor. I read it. Surprised to meet you here."

"Likewise." The *Times* smiled. "Look, have you gone into this rationally, with formulas?" He found a pencil in his pocket. "Obviously there's something wrong with our judgment of their weight - to - speed - to - momentum ratio. Maybe it's something simple like low gravity aboard ship, with magnetic shoes. Maybe they *are* floating slightly."

"Why worry?" Nathen cut in. "I don't see any reason to try to figure it out now." He laughed and shoved back his black hair nervously. "We'll see them in twenty minutes."

"Will we?" asked the *Times* slowly.

There was a silence while the Senator turned a page of his magazine with a slight crackling of paper, and the scientists argued at the other end of the room. Nathen pushed at his lank black hair again, as if it were trying to fall forward in front of his eyes and keep him from seeing.

"Sure." The young man laughed suddenly, talked rapidly. "Sure we'll see them. Why shouldn't we, with all the government ready with welcome speeches, the whole Army turned out and hiding over the hill, reporters all around, newsreel cameras—everything set up to broadcast the landing to the world. The President himself shaking hands with me and waiting in Washington—"

He came to the truth without pausing for breath.

He said, "Hell, no, they won't get here. There's some mistake somewhere. Something's wrong.

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I should have told the brasshats yesterday when I started adding it up. Don't know why I didn't say anything. Scared, I guess. Too much top rank around here. Lost my nerve."

He clutched the *Times* man's sleeve. "Look. I don't know what—"

A green light flashed on the sending-receiving set. Nathen didn't look at it, but he stopped talking.

THE loudspeaker on the set broke into a voice speaking in the alien's language. The Senator started and looked nervously at it, straightening his tie. The voice stopped.

Nathen turned and looked at the loudspeaker. His worry seemed to be gone.

"What is it?" the *Times* asked anxiously.

"He says they've slowed enough to enter the atmosphere now. They'll be here in five to ten minutes, I guess. That's Bud. He's all excited. He says holy smoke, what a murky-looking planet we live on." Nathen smiled. "Kidding."

The *Times* was puzzled. "What does he mean, murky? It can't be raining over much territory on Earth." Outside, the rain was slowing and bright blue patches of sky were shining through breaks in the cloud blanket, glittering blue light from the drops that ran down the windows. He tried to think of an explanation. "Maybe they're trying to land on Venus." The thought was ridiculous, he knew. The spaceship was following Nathen's sending beam. It couldn't miss Earth. "Bud" had to be kidding.

The green light glowed on the set again, and they stopped speaking, waiting for the message to be recorded, slowed and replayed. The cathode screen came to life suddenly with a picture of the young man sitting at his sending-set, his back turned, watching a screen at one side which showed a glimpse of a huge dark plain approaching. As the ship plunged down toward it, the illusion of solidity melted into a boiling turbulance of black clouds. They expanded in an inky swirl, looked huge for an instant, and then blackness swallowed the screen. The young alien swung around to face the camera, speaking a few words as he moved, made the O of a smile again, then flipped the switch and the screen went gray.

Nathen's voice was suddenly toneless and strained. "He said something like break out the drinks, here they come."

"The atmosphere doesn't look like that," the *Times* said at random, knowing he was saying something too obvious even to

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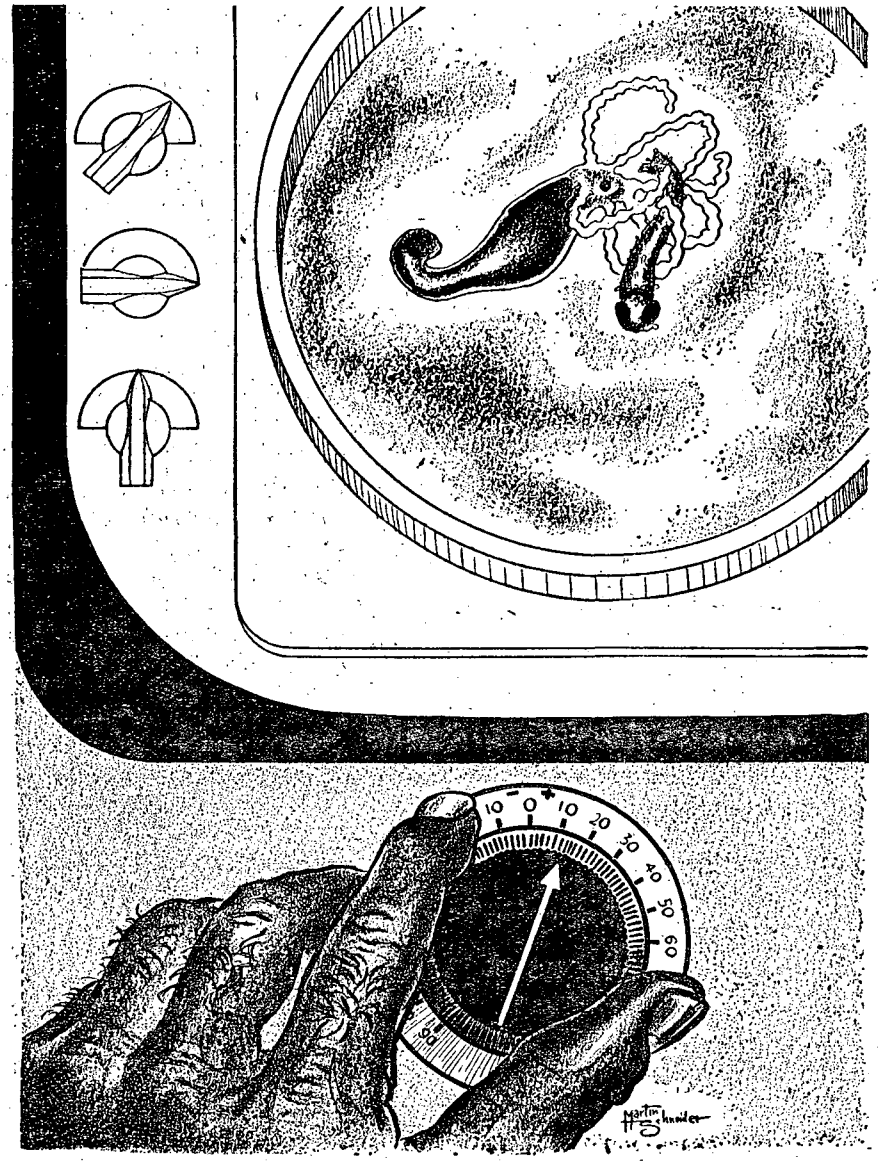

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think about. "Not Earth's atmosphere."

Some people drifted up. "What did they say?"

"Entering the atmosphere, ought to be landing in five or ten minutes," Nathen told them.

A ripple of heightened excitement ran through the room. Cameramen began adjusting the lens angles again, turning on the mike and checking it, turning on the floodlights. The scientists rose and stood near the window, still talking. The reporters trooped in from the hall and went to the windows to watch for the great event. The three linguists came in, trundling a large wheeled box that was the mechanical translator, supervising while it was hitched into the sound broadcasting system.

"Landing where?" the *Times* asked Nathen brutally. "Why don't you do something?"

"Tell me what to do and I'll do it," Nathen said quietly, not moving.

It was not sarcasm. Jacob Luke of the *Times* looked sidewise at the strained whiteness of his face, and moderated his tone. "Can't you contact them?"

"Not while they're landing."

"What now?" The *Times* took out a pack of cigarettes, remembered the rule against smoking, and put it back.

"We just wait." Nathen leaned his elbow on one knee and his chin in his hand.

They waited.

ALL the people in the room were waiting. There was no more conversation. A bald man of the scientist group was automatically buffing his fingernails over and over and inspecting them without seeing them, an-

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other absently polished his glasses, held them up to the light, put them on, and then a moment later took them off and began polishing again. The television crew concentrated on their jobs, moving quietly and efficiently, with perfectionist care, minutely arranging things which did not need to be arranged, checking things that had already been checked.

This was to be one of the great moments of human history, and they were all trying to forget that fact and remain impassive and wrapped up in the problems of their jobs as good specialists should.

After an interminable age the *Times* consulted his watch. Three minutes had passed. He tried holding his breath a moment, listening for a distant approaching thunder of jets. There was no sound.

The sun came out from behind the clouds and lit up the field like a great spotlight on an empty stage.

Abruptly the green light shone on the set again, indicating that a squawk message had been received. The recorder recorded it, slowed it and fed it back to the speaker. It clicked and the sound was very loud in the still, tense room.

The screen remained gray, but Bud's voice spoke a few words in the alien language. He stopped, the speaker clicked and the light went out. When it was plain that nothing more would occur and no announcement was to be made of what was said, the people in the room turned back to the windows, talk picked up again.

Somebody told a joke and laughed alone.

One of the linguists remained turned toward the loudspeaker, then looked at the widening patches of blue sky showing out the window, his expression puzzled. He had understood.

"It's dark," the thin Intelligence Department decoder translated, low-voiced, to the man from the *Times*. "Your atmosphere is *thick*. That's precisely what Bud said."

Another three minutes. The *Times* caught himself about to light a cigarette and swore silently, blowing the match out and putting the cigarette back into its package. He listened for the sound of the rocket jets. It was time for the landing, yet he heard no blasts.

The green light came on in the transceiver.

Message in.

Instinctively he came to his feet. Nathen abruptly was standing beside him. Then the message came in the voice he was coming to think of as Bud. It spoke and

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paused. Suddenly the *Times* knew.

"We've landed." Nathen whispered the words.

The wind blew across the open spaces of white concrete and damp soil that was the empty airfield, swaying the wet, shiny grass. The people in the room looked out, listening for the roar of jets, looking for the silver bulk of a spaceship in the sky.

Nathen moved, seating himself at the transmitter, switching it on to warm up, checking and balancing dials. Jacob Luke of the *Times* moved softly to stand behind his right shoulder, hoping he could be useful. Nathen made a half motion of his head, as if to glance back at him, unhooked two of the earphone sets hanging on the side of the tall streamlined box that was the automatic translator, plugged them in and handed one back over his shoulder to the *Times* man.

The voice began to come from the speaker again.

Hastily, Jacob Luke fitted the earphones over his ears. He fancied he could hear Bud's voice tremble. For a moment it was just Bud's voice speaking the alien language, and then, very distant and clear in his earphones, he heard the recorded voice of the linguist say an English word, then a mechanical click and another clear word in the voice of one of the other translators, then another as the alien's voice flowed from the loudspeaker, the cool single words barely audible, overlapping and blending with it like translating thought, skipping unfamiliar words, yet quite astonishingly clear.

"Radar shows no buildings or civilization near. The atmosphere around us registers as thick as glue. Tremendous gas pressure, low gravity, no light at all. You didn't describe it like this. Where are you, Joe? This isn't some kind of trick, is it?" Bud hesitated, was prompted by a deeper official voice and jerked out the words.

"If it is a trick, we are ready to repel attack."

THE linguist stood listening. He whitened slowly and beckoned the other linguists over to him and whispered to them.

Joseph Nathen looked at them with unwarranted bitter hostility while he picked up the hand-mike, plugging it into the translator. "Joe calling," he said quietly into it in clear, slow English. "No trick. We don't know where you are. I am trying to get a direction fix from your signal. Describe your surroundings to us if at all possible."

Nearby, the floodlights blazed steadily on the television platform, ready for the official wel-

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come of the aliens to Earth. The television channels of the world had been alerted to set aside their scheduled programs for an unscheduled great event. In the long room the people waited, listening for the swelling sound of rocket jets.

This time, after the light came on, there was a long delay. The speaker sputtered, and sputtered again, building to a steady scratching they could barely sense a dim voice. It came through in a few tinny words and then wavered back to inaudibility. The machine translated in their earphones.

"Tried. . . seemed. . .repair. . ." Suddenly it came in clearly. "Can't tell if the auxiliary blew, too. Will try it. We might pick you up clearly on the next try. I have the volume down. Where is the landing port? Repeat. Where is the landing port? Where are you?"

Nathen put down the hand-mike and carefully set a dial on the recording box, and flipped a switch, speaking over his shoulder. "This sets it to repeat what I said the last time. It keeps repeating." Then he sat with unnatural stillness, his head still half turned, as if he had suddenly caught a glimpse of answer and was trying with no success whatever to grasp it.

The green warning light cut in, the recording clicked and the playback of Bud's face and voice appeared on the screen.

"We heard a few words, Joe, and then the receiver blew again. We're adjusting a viewing screen to pick up the long waves that go through the murk and convert them to visible light. We'll be able to see out soon. The engineer says that something is wrong with the stern jets, and the captain has had me broadcast a help call to our nearest space base." He made the mouth O of a grin. "The message won't reach it for some years. I trust you, Joe, but get us out of here, will you? — They're buzzing that the screen is finally ready. Hold everything."

THE screen went gray, and the green light went off.

The *Times* considered the lag required for the help call, the speaking and recording of the message just received, the time needed to reconvert a viewing screen.

"They work fast." He shifted uneasily, and added at random, "Something wrong with the time factor. All wrong. They work *too* fast."

The green light came on again immediately. Nathen half turned to him, sliding his words hastily into the gap of time as the message was recorded and slowed.

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"They're close enough for our transmission power to blow their receiver."

If it was on Earth, why the darkness around the ship? "Maybe they see in the high ultra-violet — the atmosphere is opaque to that band," the *Times* suggested hastily as the speaker began to talk in the young extraterrestrial's voice.

It *was* shaking now. "Stand by for the description."

They tensed, waiting. The *Times* brought a map of the state before his mind's eye.

"A half circle of cliffs around the horizon. A wide muddy lake swarming with swimming things. Huge, strange white foliage all around the ship and incredibly huge pulpy monsters attacking and eating each other on all sides. We almost landed in the lake, right on the soft edge. The mud can't hold the ship's weight, and we're sinking. The engineer says we might be able to blast free, but the tubes are mud-clogged and might blow up the ship. When can you reach us?"

The *Times* thought vaguely of the Carboniferous Era. Nathen obviously had seen something he had not.

"Where are they?" the *Times* asked him quietly.

Nathen pointed to the antenna position indicators. The *Times* let his eyes follow the converging imaginary lines of focus out the window to the sunlit airfield, the empty airfield, the drying concrete and green waving grass where the lines met.

Where the lines met. The spaceship was there!

The fear of something unknown gripped him suddenly.

The spaceship was broadcasting again. *"Where are you? Answer if possible! We are sinking! Where are you?"*

He saw that Nathen knew. "What is it?" the *Times* asked hoarsely. "Are they in another dimension or the past or on another world or what?"

Nathen was smiling bitterly, and Jacob Luke remembered that the young man had a friend in that spaceship. "My guess is that they evolved on a high-gravity planet, with a thin atmosphere, near a blue-white star. Sure they see in the ultra-violet range. Our sun is abnormally small and dim and yellow. Our atmosphere is so thick, it screens out ultra-violet." He laughed harshly. "A good joke on us, the weird place we evolved in, the thing it did to us!"

"Where are you?" called the alien spaceship. "Hurry, please! We're sinking!"

THE decoder slowed his tumbled, frightened words and looked up into the *Times'* face

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for understanding. "We'll rescue them," he said quietly. "You were right about the time factor, right about them moving at a different speed. I misunderstood. This business about squawk coding, speeding for better transmission to counteract beam waver — I was wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"They don't speed up their broadcasts."

"They don't—?"

Suddenly, in his mind's eye, the *Times* began to see again the play he had just seen — but the actors were moving at blurring speed, the words jerking out in a fluting, dizzying stream, thoughts and decisions passing with unfollowable rapidity, rippling faces in a twisting blur of expressions, doors slamming wildly, shatteringly, as the actors leaped in and out of rooms.

No — faster, faster — he wasn't visualizing it as rapidly as it was, an hour of talk and action in one almost instantaneous "squawk," a narrow peak of "noise" interfering with a single word in an Earth broadcast! Faster — faster — it was impossible. Matter could not stand such stress — inertia — momentum — abrupt weight.

It was insane. "Why?" he asked. "How?"

Nathen laughed again harshly, reaching for the mike. "Get them out? There isn't a lake or river within hundreds of miles from here!"

A shiver of unreality went down the *Times*' spine. Automatically and inanely, he found himself delving in his pocket for a cigarette while he tried to grasp what had happened. "Where are they, then? Why can't we see their spaceship?"

Nathen switched the microphone on in a gesture that showed the bitterness of his disappointment.

"We'll need a magnifying glass for that."

—KATHERINE MacLEAN

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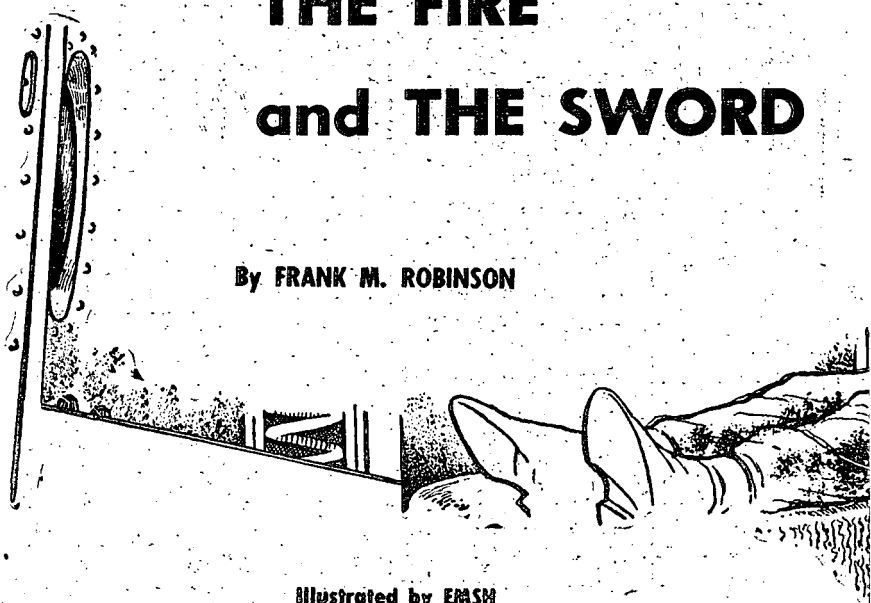
THE FIRE and THE SWORD

By FRANK M. ROBINSON



Illustrated by EMSH

Nothing could have seemed pleasanter than that peaceful planet. Then why was a non-suicidal man driven to suicide there? Yet it made sense.

WHY do people commit suicide?

Templin tightened his safety belt and lay back on the acceleration bunk. The lights in the cabin dimmed to a dull, red glow that meant the time for takeoff was nearing. He could hear noises from deep within the ship and the tiny whir of the ventilator fan, filling the air with the sweetish smell of sleeping gas. To sleep the trip away was better than to face the dull monotony

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of the stars for days on end.

Oh, they kill themselves for lots of reasons. Maybe ill health or financial messes or family difficulties. An unhapy love affair. Or more complex ones, if you went into it deeper. The failure to achieve an ambition, failure to live up to one's own ideals. Weltschmerz, perhaps.

He could smell the bitter fragrance of tobacco smoke mingling with the gas. Eckert had lit a cigarette and was calmly blowing the smoke at the neon "No Smoking" sign, which winked on and off in mechanical disapproval.

He turned his head slightly so he could just see Eckert in the bank facing him. Eckert, one of the good gray men in the Service. The old reliables, the ones who could take almost anything in their stride because, at one time or another, they had had to.

It was Eckert who had come into his office several days ago and told him that Don Pendleton had killed himself.

Only Pendleton wasn't the type. He was the kind who have everything to live for, the kind you instinctively know will amount to something someday. And that was a lousy way to remember him. The clichés always come first. Your memory plays traitor and boils friendship down to the status of a breakfast food testimonial.

The soft red lights seemed to be dancing in the darkness of the cabin. Eckert was just a dull, formless blur opposite him. His cigarette was out.

Eckert had come into his office without saying a word and had watched his scenery-window. It had been snowing in the window, the white flakes making a simple pattern drifting past the glass. Eckert had fiddled with the controls and changed it to sunshine, then to a weird mixture of hail amid the brassy, golden sunlight.

And then Eckert had told him that Pendleton had taken the short way out.

He shouldn't get sentimental. But how the hell else should he remember Pendleton? Try to forget it and drink a toast to him at the next class reunion? And never, never be so crude as to speculate why Pendleton should have done it? If, of course, he had . . .

The cabin was hazy in the reddish glow, the sleeping gas a heavy perfume.

Eckert and he had talked it out and gone over the records. Pendleton had come of good stock. There had been no mental instability in his family for as far back as the genetic records went. He had been raised in a middle-class neighborhood and attended a local grammar school where he had achieved average grades and had given his instructors the normal amount of trouble. Later,

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when he had made up his mind to enter the Diplomatic Service, his grades had improved. He had worked hard at it, though he wasn't what you would call a grind. In high school and later in college, he was the well-balanced type, athletic, popular, hard-working.

How long would it be before memories faded and all there was left of Pendleton was a page of statistics? He had been on this team, he had been elected president of that, he had graduated with such and such honors. But try getting a picture of him by reading the records, resurrect him from a page of black print. Would he be human? Would he be flesh and blood? Hell, no! In the statistics Pendleton was the All-Around Boy, the cold marble statue with the finely chiseled muscles and the smooth, blank sockets where the eyes should be. Maybe someday fate would play a trick on a hero-worshiping public and there would actually be kids like that. But they wouldn't be human; they wouldn't be born. Parents would get them by sending in so many box tops.

He was drowsy; the room was filled with the gas now. It would be only a matter of minutes before he would be asleep.

Pendleton had been in his second year as attache on Tunpesh, a small planet with a G-type sun. The Service had stumbled across it recently and decided the system was worth diplomatic recognition of some kind, so Pendleton had been sent there. He had been the first attache to be sent and naturally he had gone alone.

There was no need to send more. Tunpesh had been inspected and certified and approved. The natives were primitive and friendly. Or maybe the Service had slipped up, as it sometimes did, and Tunpesh had received something less than a thorough survey.

And then an unscheduled freighter had put in for repairs, one of the very few ships that ever came by Tunpesh. The captain had tried to pay his respects to Pendleton. Only Pendleton wasn't there. The natives said he had killed himself and showed the captain the little flower-covered plot where they had buried him.

Tunpesh had been Pendleton's second assignment.

The natives were oh-so-friendly. So friendly that he had made sure that a certain box was on board, filled with shiny atomic rifles, needle pistols, and the fat little gas guns. They might be needed. People like Pendleton didn't kill themselves, did they? No, they didn't. But sometimes they were murdered.

It was almost black inside the

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cabin now; only a thin red line around the ceiling told how close they were to takeoff. His head was thick with drowsiness, his eyelids a heavy weight that he knew he couldn't keep open much longer.

Eckert and he had been chosen to go to Tunpesh and investigate. The two of them, working together, should be able to find out why Pendleton had killed himself.

But that wasn't the real reason. Maybe Eckert thought so, but he knew better. The real reason they were going there was to find out why Pendleton had been killed and who had killed him. That was it.

Who had killed Cock Robin?

The thin red line was practically microscopic now and Templin could feel his lashes lying gently on his cheeks. But he wasn't asleep—not quite. There was something buzzing about in the dim recesses of his mind.

Their information on Tunpesh was limited. They knew that it had no trading concessions or armed forces and that nobody from neighboring systems seemed to know much about it or even visited it. But a staff anthropologist must have been routinely assigned to Tunpesh to furnish data and reports.

"Ted?" he murmured sleepily.

A faint stirring in the black bulk opposite him. "Yes?"

"How come our anthropologist on Tunpesh didn't come across with more information?"

A drowsy mumble from the other cot: "He wasn't there long enough. He committed suicide not long after landing."

The room was a whirling pool of blackness into which his mind was slowly slipping. Takeoff was only seconds away.

Why do people commit suicide?

"IT'S a nice day, isn't it, Ted?" Eckert took a deep and pleasurable breath. "It's the type of day that makes you feel good just to be alive."

Warm breezes rustled through Eckert's graying hair and tugged gently at his tunic. The air smelled as if it had been washed and faintly perfumed with the balsamy scent of something very much like pine. A few hundred yards away, a forest towered straight and slim and coolly inviting, and brilliantly colored birds whirled and fluttered in the foliage.

The rocketport, where they were standing surrounded by their luggage, was a grassy valley where the all too infrequent ships could land and discharge cargo or make repairs. There was a blackened patch on it now, with little blast-ignited flames dying out around the edges. *It won't be long before it will be green again,*

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he thought. The grass looked as though it grew fast—it would certainly have plenty of time to grow before the next ship landed.

He looked at the slim, dwindling shape that was the rocket, and was suddenly, acutely aware that he and Templin would be stranded for six months on a foreign and very possibly dangerous planet. And there would be no way of calling for help or of leaving before the six months were up.

He stood there for a moment, drinking in the fresh air and feeling the warmth of the sun against his face. It might be a pleasant six months at that, away from the din and the hustle and confusion, spending the time in a place where the sun was warm and inviting.

I must be getting old, he thought, *thinking about the warmth and comfort. Like old dogs and octogenarians.*

Templin was looking at the scenery with a disappointed expression on his face. Eckert stole a side glance at him and for a fleeting moment felt vaguely concerned. "Don't be disappointed if it doesn't look like cloak-and-dagger right off, Ray. What seems innocent enough on the surface can prove to be quite dangerous underneath."

"It's rather hard to think of danger in a setting like this."

Eckert nodded agreement. "It wouldn't fit, would it? It would be like a famous singer suddenly doing a jazz number in an opera, or having the princess in a fairy tale turn out to be ugly." He gestured toward the village. "You could hardly class that as dangerous from its outward appearance, could you?"

The rocketport was in a small valley, surrounded by low, wooded hills. The village started where the port left off and crawled and wound over the wooded ridges. Small houses of sun-baked, whitewashed mud crouched in the shadow of huge trees and hugged the banks of a small stream.

It looked fairly primitive, Eckert thought, and yet it didn't have the earmarks, the characteristics of most primitive villages. It didn't seem cluttered or dirty and you didn't feel like beating a hasty retreat when the wind was blowing toward you.

A few adults were watching them curiously and the usual bunch of kids that always congregated around rocketports quickly gathered. Eckert stared at them for a moment, wondering what it was that seemed odd about them, and they stared back with all the alert dignity of childhood. They finally came out on the field and clustered around him and Templin.

Templin studied them warily.

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"Better watch them, Ted. Even kids can be dangerous."

It's because you never suspect kids, Eckert thought, *you never think they'll do any harm. But they can be taught. They could do as much damage with a knife as a man could, for instance. And they might have other weapons.*

But the idea still didn't go with the warm sun and the blue sky and the piny scent of the trees.

One of the adults of the village started to walk toward them.

"The reception committee," Templin said tightly. His hand went inside his tunic.

He couldn't be blamed for being jumpy, Eckert realized. This was his first time out, his first mission like this. And, of course, Pendleton had been a pretty good friend of his.

"I'd be very careful what I did," Eckert said softly. "I would hate to start something merely because I misunderstood their intentions."

The committee of one was a middle-aged man dressed in a simple strip of white cloth twisted about his waist and allowed to hang freely to his knees. When he got closer, Eckert became less sure of his age. He had the firm, tanned musculature of a much younger man, though a slightly seamed face and white hair aged him somewhat. Eckert still had the feeling that if you wanted to know his exact age, you'd have to look at his teeth or know something about his epiphyseal closures.

"You are *menshars* from Earth?" The voice was husky and pleasant and the pronunciation was very clear. Eckert regarded him thoughtfully and made a few mental notes. He wasn't bowing and scraping like most natives who weren't too familiar with visitors from the sky, and yet he was hardly either friendly or hostile.

"You learned our language from Pendleton and Reynolds?" Reynolds had been the anthropologist.

"We have had visitors from Earth before." He hesitated a moment and then offered his hand, somewhat shyly, Eckert thought, in the Terrestrial sign of greeting. "You may call me *Jathong* if you wish." He paused a moment to say something in his native tongue to the kids who were around. They promptly scattered and picked up the luggage. "While you are here, you will need a place to stay. There is one ready, if you will follow me."

He was polite, Eckert thought. He didn't ask what they were there for or how long they were going to stay. But then again, perhaps the natives were a better judge of that than he and Templin.

The town was larger than he

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had thought at first, stretching over a wide expanse of the countryside. There wasn't, so far as he could see, much manufacturing above the level of handicrafts and simple weaving. Colored patches on far hillsides indicated the presence of farms, and practically every house in the village had its small garden.

What manufacturing there was seemed to be carried on in the central square of the town, where a few adults and children squatted in the warm afternoon sun and worked industriously at potter's wheels and weaver's looms. The other part of the square was given over to the native bazaar where pots and bolts of cloth were for sale, and where numerous stalls were loaded with dried fruits and vegetables and the cleaned and plucked carcasses of the local variety of fowl.

It was late afternoon when they followed Jathong into a small, white-washed house midway up a hill.

"You are free to use this while you are here," he said.

Eckert and Templin took a quick tour of the few rooms. They were well furnished, in a rustic sort of way, and what modern conveniences they didn't have they could easily do without. The youngsters who had carried their luggage left it outside and quietly faded away. It was getting dark; Eckert opened one of the boxes they had brought along, took out an electric lantern and lighted it. He turned to Jathong.

"You've been very kind to us and we would like to repay you. You may take what you wish of anything within this box." He opened another of the boxes and displayed the usual trade goods—brightly colored cloth and finely worked jewelry and a few mechanical contrivances that Eckert knew usually appealed to the primitive imagination.

Jathong ran his hand over the cloth and held some of the jewelry up to the light. Eckert knew by the way he looked at it that he wasn't at all impressed. "I am grateful," he said finally, "but there is nothing I want." He turned and walked away into the gathering darkness.

"The incorruptible native." Templin laughed sarcastically.

Eckert shrugged. "That's one of the things you do out of habit, try and buy some of the natives so you'll have friends in case you need them." He stopped for a moment, thinking. "Did you notice the context? He didn't say he didn't want what we showed him. He said there was *nothing* that he wanted. Implying that everything he wanted, he already had."

"That's not very typical of a primitive society, is it?"

"No, I'm afraid it's not." Eck-

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ert started unpacking some of the boxes. "You know, Ray, I got a kick out of the kids. They're a healthy-looking lot, aren't they?"

"Too healthy," Templin said. "There didn't seem to be any sick ones or ones with runny noses or cuts or black eyes or bruises. It doesn't seem natural."

"They're probably just well brought-up kids," Eckert said sharply. "Maybe they've been taught not to get in fights or play around in the mud on the way home from school." He felt faintly irritated, annoyed at the way Templin had put it, as if any deviation from an Earth norm was potentially dangerous.

"Ted." Templin's voice was strained. "This could be a trap, you know."

"In what way?"

The words came out slowly. "The people are too casual, as though they're playing a rehearsed part. Here we are, from an entirely different solar system, landed in what must be to them an unusual manner. They couldn't have seen rockets more than three or four times before. It should still be a novelty to them. And yet how much curiosity did they show? Hardly any. Was there any fear? No. And the cute, harmless little kids." He looked at Eckert. "Maybe that's what we're supposed to think—just an idyllic, harmless society. Maybe that's what Pendleton thought, right to the very end."

He was keyed up, jumpy, Eckert realized. He would probably be seeing things in every shadow and imagining danger to be lurking around every corner.

"It hasn't been established yet that Pendleton was killed, Ray. Let's keep an open mind until we know for certain."

He flicked out the light and lay back on the cool bed, letting his body relax completely. The cool night wind blew lazily through the wood slat blinds, carrying the fragrance of the trees and the grass, and he inhaled deeply and let his thoughts wander for a moment. It was going to be pleasant to live on Tunpesh for six months —even if the six months were all they had to live. The climate was superb and the people seemed a cut above the usual primitive culture. If he ever retired some day, he thought suddenly, he would have to remember Tunpesh. It would be pleasant to spend his old age here. And the fishing was probably excellent . . .

He turned his head a little to watch Templin get ready for bed. There were advantages in taking him along that Templin probably didn't even realize. He wondered what Templin would do if he ever found out that the actual reason he had been chosen to go was that his own psychological chart was

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vey close to Pendleton's. Pendleton's own feelings and emotions would almost exactly be duplicated in Templin's.

A few stray wisps of starlight pierced through the blinds and sparkled for an instant on a small metal box strapped to Templin's waist. A power pack, Eckert saw grimly, probably leading to the buttons on his tunic. A very convenient, portable, and hard to detect weapon.

There were disadvantages in taking Templin, too.

"JUST how primitive do you think the society is, Ted?"

Eckert put down the chain he had been whittling and reached for his pipe and tobacco.

"I don't think it's primitive at all. There are too many disparities. Their knowledge of a lot of things is a little more than empirical knowledge; they associate the growth of crops with fertilizer and nitrogen in the soil as well as sunlight, rather than the blessings of some native god. And they differ a lot in other respects. Their art and their music are advanced. Free art exists along with purely decorative art, and their techniques are finely developed."

"I'm glad you agree, then. Take a look at this." Templin threw a shiny bit of metal on the rough-hewn table. Eckert picked it up and inspected it. It was heavy and one side of it was extremely sharp.

"What's it for?"

"They've got a hospital set up here. Not a hospital like any we know, of course, but a hospital nonetheless. It's not used very much; apparently the natives don't get sick here. But occasionally there are hunting accidents and injuries that require surgery. The strip of metal there is a scalpel." He laughed shortly. "Primitive little gadget, but it works well—as well as any of ours."

Eckert hefted it in his palm. "The most important thing is that they have the knowledge to use it. Surgery isn't a simple science."

"Well, what do you think about it?"

"The obvious. They evidently have as much technology as they want, at least in fields where they have to have it."

"How come they haven't gone any further?"

"Why should they? You can live without skycars and rocket ships, you know."

"Did you ever wonder what kind of weapons they might have?"

"The important thing," Eckert mused, "is not if they have them, but if they'd use them. And I rather doubt that they would. We've been here for two weeks now and they've been very kind to us, seeing that we've had food

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and water and what fuel we need."

"It's known in the livestock trade as being fattened up for the slaughter," Templeton said.

Eckert sighed and watched a fat bug waddle across a small patch of sunlight on the wooden floor. It was bad enough drawing an assignment in a totally foreign culture, even if the natives were humanoid. It complicated things beyond all measure when your partner in the project seemed likely to turn into a vendettist. It meant that Eckert would have to split his energies. He'd have to do what investigating he could among the Tunpeshans, and he'd have to watch Templin to see that he didn't go off half-cocked and spoil everything.

"You're convinced that Pendleton was murdered, aren't you?"

Templin nodded. "Sure."

"Why?"

"The Tunpeshans know why we're here. We've dropped enough hints along those lines. But nobody has mentioned Pendleton; nobody has volunteered any information about him. And he was an attache here for three years. Didn't anybody know him during that time? We've let slip a few discreet statements that we would like to talk to Pendleton's friends, yet nobody's come around. Apparently, in all the three years he was here, Pendleton didn't make any friends. And that's a little hard to believe. It's more likely that his friends have been silenced and any information about him is being withheld for a reason."

"What reason?"

Templin shrugged. "Murder. What other reason could there be?"

Eckert rolled up the thin, slatted blinds and stared out at the scenery. A hundred feet down the road, a native woman was going to market, leading a species of food animal by the halter.

"They grow their women nice, don't they?"

"Physically perfect, like the men," Templin grumbled. "You could get an inferiority complex just from watching the people here. Everybody's so damn perfect. Nobody's sick, nobody's unhealthy, nobody is too fat or too thin, nobody's unhappy. The only variation is that they don't all look alike. Perfection. It gets boring after a while."

"Does it? I hadn't noticed." Eckert turned away from the blinds. His voice was crisp. "I knew Don Pendleton quite well, too," he said. "But it isn't blinding me to what I'm here for. We came to find out what happened to him, not to substantiate any preconceived notions. What we find out may be vitally important to anybody serving here in the

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future. I would hate to see our efforts spoiled because you've already made up your mind."

"You knew Pendleton," Templin repeated grimly. "Do you think it was suicide?"

"I don't think there's such a thing as a suicide type, when you come down to it. I'm not ruling out the possibility of murder, either. I'm trying to keep an open mind."

"What have we accomplished so far? What have we found out?"

"We've got six months," Eckert said quietly. "Six months in which we'll try to live here inconspicuously and study the people and try to cultivate informants. We would get nowhere if we came barging in asking all sorts of questions. And don't forget, Ray, we're all alone on Tunpesh. If it is a case of murder, what happens when the natives find out that we know it is?"

Templin's eyes dueled for a moment. Then he turned his back and walked to the window. "I suppose you're right," he said at last. "It's nice living here, Ted. Maybe I've been fighting it. But I can't help thinking that Don must have liked it here, too."

ONE of the hardest things to learn in a foreign culture, Eckert thought, is when to enjoy yourself, when to work and when to worry.

"Pelache, menshar?"

"Sharra!" He took the small bowl of *pelache* nuts, helped himself to a few, and passed the bowl on. This was definitely the time to enjoy himself, not to work or worry. He had heard about the *halera* a few days ago, and, by judicious hinting to the proper authorities, he and Templin had been invited. It was a good chance to observe native customs. A little anthropology—with refreshments.

The main courses started making the rounds and he took generous helpings of the roasted *ulami* and the broiled *halunch* and numerous dabs from the side dishes of steaming vegetables. Between every course, they passed around a small flagon of the hot, spiced native wine, but he noticed that nobody drank to excess.

The old Greek ideal, he thought: *moderation in everything.*

He looked at Templin, sitting across from him in the huge circle, and shrugged mentally. Templin looked as if he was about to break down and enjoy himself, but there was still a slight bulge under his tunic, where he had strapped his power pack. Any fool should have known that nothing would happen at a banquet like this. The only actual danger lay in Templin's getting excited and doing something he was bound to regret later on. And even that danger

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was not quite as likely now.

There will be hell to pay, Eckert thought, *if Templin ever finds out that I sabotaged his power pack.*

"You look thoughtful, *menshar* Eckert."

Eckert took another sip of the wine and turned to the Tunpeshan on his left. He was a tall, muscular man with sharp eyes, a firm chin and a certain aura of authority.

"I was wondering if my countryman Pendleton had offended your people in any way, Nayova." Now was as good a time as any to pump him for what he knew about Pendleton's death.

"So far as I know, *menshar* Pendleton offended no one. I do not know what duties he had to perform here, but he was a generous and courteous man."

Eckert gnawed the dainty meat off a slender *ulami* bone and tried to appear casual in his questioning.

"I am sure he was, Nayova. I am sure, too, that you were as kind to him as you have been to Templin and myself. My Government is grateful to you for that."

Nayova seemed pleased. "We tried to do as well for *menshar* Pendleton as we could. While he was here, he had the house that you have now and we saw that he was supplied with food and all other necessities."

Eckert had a sudden clammy feeling which quickly passed away. What Nayova had said was—something he'd make sure Templin never heard about. He wiped his mouth on a broad, flat leaf that had been provided and took another sip of the wine.

"We were shocked to find out that *menshar* Pendleton had killed himself. We knew him quite well and we could not bring ourselves to believe he had done such a thing."

Nayova's gaze slid away from him. "Perhaps it was the will of the Great One," he said vaguely. He didn't seem anxious to talk about it.

Eckert stared bleakly at his wine glass and tried to put the pieces of information together. They probably had a taboo about self-destruction which would make it difficult to talk about. That would make it even harder for him to find out by direct questioning.

A native fife trilled shrilly and a group of young men and women walked into the room. The circle broke to let them through and they came and knelt before Nayova. When he clapped his hands sharply, they retreated to the center of the circle and began the slow motions of a native dance.

The sound of the fife softened and died and the slow monotonous beat of drums took its place.

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The beat slowly increased and so did the rhythm of the dancers. The small fires at the corners of the hut were allowed to dwindle and the center of the circle became filled with the motions of shadows intermixed with the swift, sure movements of glistening limbs. Eckert felt his eyebrows crawl upward. Apparently the dance was the Tunpeshan version of the *rites de passage*. He glanced across the circle at Templin. Templin's face — what he could see of it by the flickering light—was brick red.

A voice spoke in his ear. "It is hard for us to imagine anybody doing what *menshar* Pendleton did. It is . . ." and he used a native word that Eckert translated as being roughly equivalent to "*obscene*."

The dancers at the center of the circle finally bowed out with small garlands of flowers on their heads that signified their reaching adulthood. Acrobats then took the stage and went throuh a dizzying routine, and they in turn were succeeded by a native singer.

They were all excellent, Eckert thought. If anything, they were too good.

The bowl of *pelache* nuts made its way around again and Nayova leaned over to speak to him. "If there is any possibility that I can help you while you are here, *menshar* Eckert, you have but to ask."

It would probably be a mistake to ask for a list of Pendleton's friends, but there was a way around that. "I would like to meet any of your people who had dealings with Pendleton, either in business or socially. I will do everything not to inconvenience them in any way."

"I think they would be glad to help you. I shall ask them to go to you this coming week."

IT wasn't a driving rain, just a gentle drizzle that made the lanes muddy and plastered Eckert's tunic against him. He didn't mind it; the rain was warm and the trees and grass smelled good in the wet.

"How would you classify the culture after seeing the ceremony, Ted?" Templin asked.

"About what you would expect. An Apollonian culture, simple and dignified. Nothing in excess, no striving for great emotional release."

Templin nodded soberly. "It grows on you, doesn't it? You find yourself getting to like the place. And I suppose that's dangerous, too. You tend to let your guard down, the way Pendleton must have. You—what was that?"

Eckert tensed. There was a gentle padding in the mud, several hundred feet behind them. Templin flattened himself in the shadows alongside a house. His hand

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darted inside his tunic and came out with the slim deadliness of a needle gun.

"Don't use it!" Eckert whispered tersely.

Templin's eyes were thin, frightened slits in the darkness. "Why not?"

Eckert's mind raced. It might be nothing at all, and then again it might be disaster. But there was still a chance that Templin might be wrong. And there were more immediate reasons.

"How many charges do you have for that?"

"Twelve."

"You think you can stand there and hold them off with only twelve charges for your needle gun?"

"There's my power pack."

"It's no good," Eckert said softly. "The batteries in it are dead. I was afraid you might do something foolish with it."

The footsteps were only yards away. He listened intently, but it was hard to tell how many there were by the sound.

"What do we do then?"

"See if they're following us first," Eckert said practically. "They might not be, you know."

They slid out from the shadows and ducked down another lane between the houses. The footsteps behind them speeded up and came down the same lane.

"We'll have to head back for our house," Eckert whispered.

They started running as quietly as they could, slipping and sliding in the mud. Another stretch

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past the shuttered, crouching houses and they found themselves in the square they had visited on the day they had landed. It was deserted, the looms and pottery wheels covered with cloth and reeds to keep off the rain. They darted across it, two thin shadows racing across the open plaza, and hurried down another path.

The last path led to the small river that cut through the city. Templin looked around, gestured to Eckert, waded into the water and crouched under the small bridge that spanned it. Eckert swore silently to himself, then followed Templin in.

The cold water swirled under his armpits and he bit his lips to

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keep himself from sneezing. Templin's emotions were contagious. Would he have worried about the footsteps? He frowned and tried to be honest with himself. Perhaps he would—and perhaps he wouldn't have. But he couldn't have let Templin stay there and face the unknown approachers. Not Templin.

Footsteps approached the bridge, hesitated a moment, then pattered on the wooden structure and faded off down the muddy path. Eckert let his breath out slowly. The footsteps were curiously light.

There was only one pair of them.

"I WOULD like to know something," Templin said coldly. He stripped off his power pack and let it fall to the floor of their house. "Why did you decide to substitute dead batteries in the pack?"

"Because," Eckert said shortly, "I was afraid you would do something with it that you might regret later. You're inexperienced in situations like this. Your reactions aren't to be trusted. One false move here and we could follow Pendleton, however he died. You know that." He wriggled out of his tunic and slowly peeled off his wet trousers.

There was a timid knock at the door. He wrapped a blanket about himself and motioned to Templin to stand to one side. Templin grabbed a small stool, hefted it in one hand, and complied.

Eckert went to the door and casually threw it open.

A girl stood there, half in the outer darkness and half in the yellowish light from the room, covered with mud to the knees and drenched to the skin.

"The *menshar* forgot this at the *halera*," she said softly. She quickly handed him his pipe and a soggy bag of tobacco, and disappeared instantly into the rain. He listened for the sound of her footsteps in the soft mud and then closed the door.

Templin put down the stool and stared stupidly at the pipe and the tobacco sack. Eckert placed them carefully on the table and began to towel himself.

"We probably face as much danger from our own imaginations as from anything else," he said grimly. "Tell me, would you have fired first, or would you have waited until you found out for sure who she was and what she wanted when she first started to follow us?"

"I don't know," Templin said sullenly.

"Then I'll leave to your imagination the position we would be in now, if you had given in to your impulse."

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"WE haven't found out much, have we?" Templin demanded some days later.

"No," Eckert admitted. "We haven't."

He riffled through the thick stack of cards on the table. Statistically, the results were not only interesting but slightly phenomenal. During the three years or so that Pendleton had been on Tunpesh, he had met and known approximately seven hundred of the natives. By far the greater majority of these, of course, were purely casual and meant nothing. Almost a hundred, though, had had extended relations with Pendleton in business or social affairs. Of this hundred, none—not a single one—would admit that he had known Pendleton well or could be considered a friend of his. About all they had to say was that Pendleton had been healthy and easy to get along with, and one warm night he had shocked the community by going off and shooting himself.

"Like Richard Cory," Eckert said aloud.

"Like who?" Templin asked.

"Richard Cory. A character in a poem by a Twentieth Century poet, Edwin Arlington Robinson. Apparently he had everything to live for, but 'Richard Cory, one calm summer night, went home and put a bullet through his head.' "

"I'll have to look it up some day," Templin said. He pointed to the stack of cards. "That's so much waste paper, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," Eckert said reluctantly. "To be frank, I had hoped we'd know a lot more by now. I still can't understand why we haven't dug up anybody who will admit having been his friend."

"How do you know they're telling the truth? Or, for that matter, how do you know that the ones we've seen so far are the ones who *actually* knew Pendleton?"

Eckert drummed his fingers on the table. *You handle different human cultures for twenty-five years and you get to the point where you can tell if people are lying or not. Or do you? Maybe just an old man's conceit. Age alone never lent wisdom. Regardless of the personal reasons that Templin might have for thinking the Tunpeshans are lying, the fact remains that they very easily could be. And what should you do if they are?*

There was a polite knock at the door.

"We've got another visitor," Templin said sarcastically. "He probably saw Pendleton at a *halera* four years ago and wants to be sure we know all about it."

The Tunpeshan looked faintly familiar to Eckert. There was something about the man's carriage . . .

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"I met you the day you landed," the Tunpeshan began, and Eckert remembered. Jathong, the guide who had shown them to the house.

"You knew Pendleton?"

Jathong nodded. "I and a fellow weaver took over his small office after he had left it." Eckert recalled the small office in the square with the bolts of cloth on display, and the small mud brick on the window ledge with the incised lettering reading:

DONALD PENDLETON, SERVICE ATTACHE.

"Why you didn't tell us this before?"

"I didn't know what kind and how much information you wanted."

We didn't ask him, Eckert thought, *so he didn't volunteer any information. Polite, to say the least.*

"How long did you know him?"

"Since he landed. I was the one appointed to him."

"What do you mean—appointed to him?"

"To try to learn his language, and try to teach him ours."

Eckert felt his interest rising. Jathong, then, must have known Pendleton fairly well.

"Did he have any enemies that you know of?"

"Enemies?" Jathong seemed ignorant of the meaning of the word, so Eckert explained. "No, he had no enemies. He would naturally have none such on Tunpesh."

Templin leaned forward, tense. "If he had no enemies, why did he have no friends? You, for example, knew him longer and better than most. Why is it that you weren't his friend?"

Jathong looked unhappy, as if being forced to say something he wanted not to say. "Pendleton was *kava* — I cannot explain it. The concept is difficult. You would not understand."

He might be running the danger of throwing too many questions at Jathong, Eckert realized, and having him freeze up or turn vague. But it couldn't be helped. They had made no progress at all by subtlety, and time would eventually run out.

He tried to broach the next question delicately. "Did Pendleton know any of the women of your race?"

"He knew some of the women, as he knew the men."

The answer didn't tell Eckert what he wanted to know. "Was he in love with any woman?" It sounded crude the way he put it, but it was hard to think of any other way of asking it.

JATHONG looked at him incredulously, as if Eckert had asked him if Pendleton had had two heads.

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"That would have been impossible. None of our women would have—could have—been in love with *menshar* Pendleton."

One line of inquiry just gone phht, Eckert thought. *But Pendleton wasn't one to let a broken heart get him down anyway.*

"Why not?" Templin cut in harshly. "He wasn't hard to look at and he would have made a good husband."

Jathong diplomatically turned around to face Templin. "I have told you once — Pendleton was *kava.* It would have been quite impossible."

The answer to what had happened to Pendleton probably lay in Jathong's inability to explain his own terms, Eckert believed. One could get just so close, and then the definitions became vague and useless.

He asked a few more questions and finally dismissed Jathong. The interview, like all the others he and Templin had held during the last week, had been worthless. They knew nothing more than they had when they landed.

"I still thing they're lying," Templin said almost savagely. "Or perhaps the ones who really know something haven't come around."

ECKERT got his pipe and sat near the doorway, letting the sunlight streaming through the foliage of a nearby tree dapple his face with a checkerboard pattern of modulated lights and velvety shadows.

"If they're evading us or if they're lying, then the society is a dangerous one for us. But I still can't believe it. They're not warlike. They don't seem to have many weapons and definitely none of an advanced type."

"How could anybody know for sure?"

Eckert methodically knocked the cold ashes out of his pipe and added more tobacco. "Easy. Despite what you read in story books, no civilization lives simply, governs itself simply, and yet possesses 'super-blasters.' The sword-and-blaster combination just doesn't exist. Any weapon above the level of bows and arrows or knives is the product of a well advanced technology. Along with weapons, of course, you have to have good communications. Now take an ordinary radio and think of the degree of knowledge, technology, and industrialization that would have to exist to supply it. There's nothing like that here."

Templin came over to the warmth streaming in through the doorway. "It almost seems that they're acting in concert, though —as if there were some kind of plot, where, by prearrangement, everybody knows exactly what to say."

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"You're wrong again. You can practically smell a dictatorship or a tyranny, which is the only situation in which almost one hundred per cent of the population will follow the same line through fear of the consequences if they don't. In a situation like that, the people are frightened, unhappy. You can hardly say that's the case on Tunpesh."

"No," Templin admitted, "you couldn't. But, still, you have to admit that the answers we've received so far are just too unanimous—and too sketchy. All agree that Pendleton was a fine fellow; all agree that he had no native friends."

Eckert nodded. "I'll go along with that. And I think it's time we did something about it. Tonight we'll have to start eliminating certain ideas."

He took a small case from their pile of luggage and opened it. Inside was a small, battery-powered box with various dials set on the front and the usual electrodes and nerve probes protruding from the sides and the top.

Templin looked at it with surprise.

"That will be dangerous to use, won't it?"

"It might be more dangerous not to. Time is getting to be a factor and we have to make some progress. We have a safety margin of a sort in that we can erase memories of its use, but the procedure is still risky."

"Who do we use it on?"

"As long as we're going to use it," Eckert said grimly, "we might as well start at the top."

When they had started out, the investigation had seemed fairly simple to Eckert. There were two possibilities — either Pendleton had committed suicide or he had been murdered. Knowing Pendleton's record, the first possibility had seemed remote. A few weeks on Tunpesh had convinced him that the second possibility was also remote. One or the other had to be eliminated. The second would be the easiest.

There were other reasons as well. Templin was still convinced that Pendleton had been killed, and Templin was an emotional man with access to powerful weapons. The question was not what he might eventually do, but when.

THE night looked as if it would be another rainy one. It was cooler than usual and dark clouds were scudding across the starlit sky. Eckert and Templin stood in the shadows of the house, watching the dark lane for any casual strollers. Eckert looked at his watch. A few minutes more and Nayova would come out for his evening walk.

Eckert had just started to think

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longingly of his bed and the warmth inside his house when the door opened and Nayova appeared in the opening. Eckert held his breath while the chieftain stood uncertainly in the doorway, testing the night air, and then let it out slowly when Nayova started down the lane.

They closed in on him.

"The *menshars* from Earth," he said without alarm. "Is there something you wish?"

"We would like you to come with us to our house for a while," Eckert started in.

Nayova looked puzzled. "I do not understand. Would not tomorrow do as well?"

"I'm afraid it'll have to be tonight."

Nayova was obviously not quite sure of their threat.

"No, I . . ."

Eckert caught him before he touched the ground. Templin took the rag off the butt of the needle gun, lifted the ruler's feet, and they disappeared into the brush along the lane.

They would have to sneak back to the house, Eckert knew, and hope that nobody saw them lugging the unconscious native. He laughed a little grimly to himself. Templin had expected cloak-and-dagger. It looked as if he was going to get more than his share of it, after all.

Once inside the house, Eckert arranged the electrodes and the small nerve probes on Nayova, who had come to.

"I am sorry," Eckert said formally," but we find this necessary. You understand that we have to find out all we can about Pendleton. We have no choice."

He found it difficult to look the ruler in the face, even with the realization that this was strictly in the line of duty and that the chieftain would not be hurt.

"But I have cooperated with you in every way possible!" Nayova protested. "I have told you everything we know!"

"That's right," Templin said bluntly. "And now we're going to ask you the same questions."

Nayova looked blank for a moment and then reddened as he understood.

TEMPLIN turned to the dials on the little square box.

"We would like to know," Eckert said politely, "where you were two weeks ago at this time of night."

Nayova looked surprised. "You know that I was at the *halera*, the coming-of-age ceremony. You were there with me, as my guests. You should assuredly know I was there."

Eckert looked over at Templin, who nodded shortly. It had been a standard question, to test the apparatus.

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"Did Pendleton have any enemies here on Tunpesh?"

Nayova emphatically shook his head. "To the best of my knowledge, *menshar* Pendleton had no enemies here. He would have none."

Templin's face showed its disappointment.

"Who were his friends?"

"He had no friends."

Templin glowered angrily, but he said nothing.

Eckert frowned. The same answer—Pendleton had had no enemies and yet he had had no friends.

"Would you say he was well liked here?"

"I would say no."

"Why not?"

A shrug. "It is hard to explain and you would not be able to understand."

"Did somebody here kill Pendleton?"

Eckert could hear Templin suck in his breath.

"No."

"Ask him that again," Templin cut in.

"Did somebody kill Pendleton?"

"No."

"Did Pendleton kill himself?"

A trace of disgust showed on Nayova's face.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

Templin gestured to Eckert to take the box. "Let me ask him." He came around and faced the native. "Why did your people kill Pendleton?"

"We did not kill him. We had no reason to wish him harm."

"Do you expect us to believe that Pendleton killed himself? We knew him better than that."

"You may believe whatever you wish. But men change and perhaps he did. We did not kill him. Such an act would have been repugnant to us."

"I think that's enough," Eckert said calmly.

Templin bit his lip as Eckert touched another dial on the machine. Nayova suddenly jerked, looked blank, and slumped in the chair.

Eckert took off the electrodes. "Help me take him back, will you, Ray?"

THEY carried Nayova to his house, stayed with him until he showed signs of recovering, and then left.

"Why didn't you use a drug?" Templin demanded.

"Possible allergy or serum reaction. We don't know enough about these people to take chances — they're humanoid, not human."

"They can fool machines, though, can't they?"

Eckert didn't reply.

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"All right, I know they can't," Templin said grudgingly. "He was telling the truth all the time, wasn't he?"

Eckert nodded. "I never did think he was lying. They don't seem to be the type; their culture doesn't allow for it."

They were silent for a while, walking quietly in the lanes between the shuttered, seemingly untenanted houses.

"I'm glad," Templin said quietly. "It's off my mind. It's hard to believe that anybody here would . . . deliberately kill somebody else."

Templin's reactions would be worth something now for Eckert to study. They wouldn't be inhibited by his conviction that the natives had murdered his best friend. Just what reactions and emotions he would display, Eckert wasn't sure, nor how Templin's psychology, so similar to Pendleton's, would help solve the problem.

They had eliminated one possibility, but that still left them with the one they had started with.

Why had Pendleton taken the short way out?

A BREEZE scampered through the open door and played tag with the papers on the desk. Eckert swore without annoyance and calmly started chasing those that had been blown on the floor.

"What did Pendleton have to say in his reports?" Templin sat in the doorway, his eyes barely open. He had begun taking siestas in the early afternoon, after their usual light lunch. It was pleasant to sit on the worn wood and feel the warmth of sun and smell the crisp freshness of the outdoors, or maybe watch the kids playing in the lane, catching the butterflies that floated past in the afternoon air.

"About what you'd expect. Mostly reports on the industry, climate, system of government, and general anthropological information that he thought might prove interesting. As far as I can see, he didn't lack enthusiasm for making the reports. If anything, he grew more enthusiastic as time went on. He practically wrote us treatises on every phase of life on Tunpesh."

Templin's eyes closed all the way.

"Any indication in his reports that he didn't like it here?"

"Just the other way around. Everything points to the fact that he liked the climate, the people, the way they lived."

"I don't blame him," Templin murmured. "This is a lovely place to be. The climate is wonderful, the people are happy, hard-working. The society itself seems to be —perfect. Sometimes you can't

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help but compare it too damn favorably to Earth."

Eckert shoved the papers to one side and came over to where Templin sat. He felt rather lazy himself. The warmth and sunshine corroded ambition, as it did in most climates like this.

"You know, there isn't any crime here," Templin continued. He laughed to himself. "Except the minor crime wave we caused when we landed here five months ago. No criminals, no villains foreclosing mortgages, no gamblers bleeding the gullible white, and nobody trying to sell gold bricks. I can't get over it."

A BUTTERFLY flapped into the sunlight that glistened on his tunic, like a drop of water on a piece of black velvet. It hung there for a moment and then was off, its wings flashing.

Eckert watched it go in a sort of torpor. It was pleasant to relax and slip the leash off your thoughts quietly and see where they took you. Maybe it was a sort of letdown. They had expected six months of danger in a potentially criminal culture, and instead it had been paradise.

As Templin said, you couldn't help but compare it to Earth. No greed, no belligerency, no contempt for the rights of others. No cynicism, no sarcasm, and no trampling crowds in the stores. The little important things . . .

"Where did you go last night, Ray?"

Templin stirred. "A community meeting. Almost like a Quaker meeting. You get up and say what you think. The one last night was about some local government issues. They talked it over, decided what to do, and how much each person should contribute. The original democracy, Ted."

Eckert was wide awake. "I wonder why I wasn't invited." He felt slightly put out that Templin should have been asked to something like that and he hadn't been.

"I wasn't invited," Templin said. "I invited myself."

"Have you noticed," Eckert mused, "we haven't been invited to too many functions lately?"

"They know we're busy," Templin said lazily. "They're too polite to ask us to go some place if they thought we were busy doing something else."

"You like it here, don't you, Ray?"

Templin brushed idly at a marauding mosquito. "It took me pretty long to warm up to it, but I guess I do."

They only had a month left, Eckert knew — a month to do practically nothing but lie in the sun and watch the people. Oh, they could go through the motions of investigating and look

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over Pendleton's old records and reports, but there was nothing in them of any value.

He yawned and sat down and settled his back against the door frame. It began to look as if they'd never find out why Pendleton had done what he had. And it didn't seem to matter, somehow.

ECKERT opened the door slowly. Templin was asleep on the bed, the sunlight lying in bands across his tanned, bare back. He had on a strip of white cloth, knotted at the waist in imitation of what the natives wore.

It was mussed now, and the knot had started to come loose.

He looked a lot healthier than he had when they had first landed. More peaceful, more content. He appeared to have gained ten pounds and shed five years in the last six months.

And now the vacation was over. It was time to go back.

"Ray," Eckert called out to him softly.

Templin didn't stir, but continued his soft and very regular breathing.

Eckert found a book and dropped it on the floor with a thud. Templin woke up, but didn't move.

"What do you want, Ted?"

"How did you know it was me?"

Templin chuckled, as if it were hugely funny. "Riddles yet. Who else would it be? No Tunpeshan would be rude enough to wake somebody up in the middle of a nap, so it had to be you."

"You know what you would have done if somebody had awakened you like that five months ago?"

Templin tried to nod, but was slightly handicapped by the bed underneath him. "I would have pulled my trusty atomgun and plugged him."

Eckert went over to where they kept their luggage and started pulling the boxes out from the wall. "Well, I've got good news for you. A liner just landed to pick us up. They were going through this sector and they got an order from the Service to stop by for us. Some cargo-wallopers will be here in a few minutes to help us with our gear."

"Ted."

Eckert paused.

"Yes?"

"I'm not going back."

"Why not?" Eckert's face had a look of almost clinical curiosity on it.

"Why should I? I like it here. I want to live here the rest of my life."

THE pieces began to fall in place.

"I'm not so sure you'd like it,

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Ray. Not after a while. All your friends are back on Earth. Everybody you know is back there. It's just the novelty of something new and something different here. I've felt that way a lot of times in different cultures and different societies. You'd change your mind after a while."

"Those aren't reasons, Ted. Why should I go back to a world where most of the people are unhappy at some time and a few people all the time? As far as I'm concerned, Tunpesh is my home now, and I don't intend to leave it."

Eckert was fascinated. It was like a case history unfolding right before his eyes.

"Are you sure you would enjoy it here for the rest of your life? Have you made any friends to take the place of those back home?"

"It takes time to become acquainted, even more time to make friends," Templin said defensively.

"You can't desert the Service," Eckert pointed out. "You still have your duty."

Templin laughed in his pillow. "It won't work, Ted. Duty's just a catch word, a jingo phrase. They can get along without me and you know it."

"What about Pendleton, Ray?" He died here, you know, in mysterious circumstances."

"Would going back help him any? He wasn't murdered; we know that. And why do people commit suicide? For what one of several thousand possible reasons did Pendleton? We don't know. We'll never know. And if we did know, what good would it do?"

He had changed a lot in six months, Eckert saw.

Too much.

"What if I told you I knew why Pendleton killed himself?" Eckert asked. "And that you would do the same if you stayed here?"

"Don't use it, Ted. It's poor psychology. It won't work."

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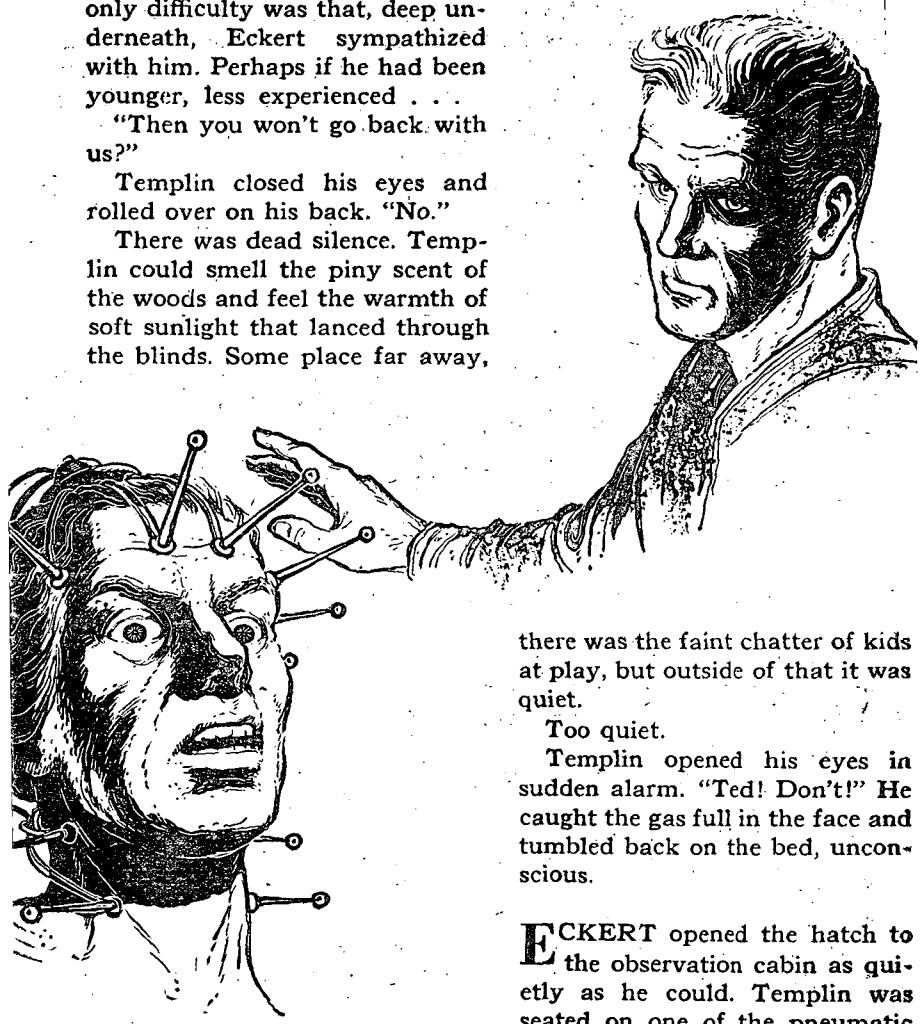
The pieces made a perfect picture. But Templin was going back whether he wanted to or not. The only difficulty was that, deep underneath, Eckert sympathized with him. Perhaps if he had been younger, less experienced . . .

"Then you won't go back with us?"

Templin closed his eyes and rolled over on his back. "No."

There was dead silence. Templin could smell the piny scent of the woods and feel the warmth of soft sunlight that lanced through the blinds. Some place far away, there was the faint chatter of kids at play, but outside of that it was quiet.



Too quiet.

Templin opened his eyes in sudden alarm. "Ted! Don't!" He caught the gas full in the face and tumbled back on the bed, unconscious.

ECKERT opened the hatch to the observation cabin as quietly as he could. Templin was seated on one of the pneumatic couches, staring soberly at a small

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yellow star in the black sky. He didn't look up.

"It's me, Ray," Eckert said.

Templin didn't move.

"I suppose I owe you an apology," Eckert began, "but I had to gas you to get you to leave. Otherwise you wouldn't have left. And the same thing would have happened to you that happened to Don Pendleton."

"You're sure of that?" Templin asked bitterly.

"Reasonably. You're a lot like Pendleton, you know. In fact, that's why you were selected to go—not so much because you knew him as the fact that psychologically you were a lot like him. We thought that by studying your response to situations there, we would have a picture of what Pendleton's must have been."

Templin didn't want to talk about it, Eckert realized, but it had to be explained to him.

"Do you want to know why Pendleton killed himself?"

Templin shrugged listlessly.

"I suppose we should have seen it right away," Eckert continued. "Any race that is so happy with their way of life that they show no curiosity about strangers, the way they live, or what possessions they have, must have something to be happy about. Tunpesh is something that might happen only once in a thousand civilizations, maybe less, Ray.

"The environment is perfection and so are the people, or at least as near to perfection as it's possible to get. An intelligent people who have as much technology as they desire, living simply with themselves and each other. A fluke of nature, perhaps. No criminals, no insane, no neurotics. A perfect cultural pattern. Tunpesh is a paradise. You didn't want to leave, neither did I, and neither did Pendleton."

Templin turned on him. "So it was paradise. Would it have been criminal if I had stayed there? Who would it have hurt?"

"It would have hurt you," Eckert said gravely. "Because the Tunpeshans would never have accepted you. We're too different, Ray. We're too aggressive, too pushy, too persistent. We're not —perfect. You see, no matter how long we stayed there, we would never have fit in. We lived in a harsh society and we bear the scars of it. Our own environment has conditioned us, and we can't change. Oh, we could try, but it would crop up in little ways. Because of that, the natives could never genuinely like us. We'd never belong. Their own cultural pattern wouldn't allow them to accept us.

"Their cultural pattern is like the Fire and the Sword that were placed outside the Garden of

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Eden, after Adam and Eve were driven out, to keep it sacrosanct. If you're an outsider, you stay outside. You can never come in."

HE paused a moment, waiting for Templin to say something. Templin didn't.

"The natives have a word for it. *Kava*. It means, I suppose, *different* — not necessarily inferior, just different. We should have seen it as time went on. We weren't invited places; they seemed to avoid us. A natural reaction for them, I guess I have to admit."

Eckert cleared his throat huskily. "You see, what happened to Pendleton," he continued awkwardly, "is that he fell in love with paradise, but paradise would have nothing to do with him. By the time three years were up, he knew that he was an outcast in Eden. And he couldn't leave, to come back and try to forget. He was stranded in paradise and had to look forward to spending four more years there as a pariah. He couldn't do it. And neither could you."

He was quiet for a moment, thinking of the cool, scented air and the warm sunshine and the happy kids playing on the grassy lanes.

"I suppose it didn't affect you at all, did it?" Templin asked venomously.

A SHADOW crossed Eckert's face. "You should know better than that, Ray. Do you think I'll ever forget it? Do you think I'll ever be satisfied with my own culture again?"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"It's dangerous to human beings, Ray. Looking at it brutally, their culture has killed two of our people as surely as if Tunpesh were populated by murderous savages. We'll probably send a larger commission, throw it open to commerce, try to change it."

Templin gripped the sides of the couch, his face strained and tense with anxiety. "What happens to it depends on the report you make, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does."

"Then make up something in your report. Say the climate is bad for Earthmen. Say anything, but don't let them change Tunpesh!"

Eckert looked at him for a long moment, remembering.

"Okay, Ray," he said slowly. "We'll leave paradise alone. Strictly alone. It'll be put on the quarantine list."

He turned and left.

Behind him, Templin swiveled around in his chair and gazed bleakly at the tiny mote of yellow fading in the blackness of space.

—FRANK M. ROBINSON

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A Little Journey

By RAY BRADBURY

She'd paid good money to see the inevitable

. . . and then had to work to make it happen!

THERE were two important things—one, that she was very old; two, that Mr. Thirkell was taking her to God. For hadn't *he* patted her hand and said: "Mrs. Bellowes, we'll take off into space in my rocket, and go to find Him together"?

And that was how it was going to be. Oh, this wasn't like any other group Mrs. Bellowes had ever joined. In her fervor to light

Illustrated by THORNE

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a path for her delicate, tottering feet, she had struck matches down dark alleys, and found her way to Hindu mystics who floated their flickering, starry eyelashes over crystal balls. She had walked on the meadow paths with ascetic Indian philosophers imported by daughters-in-spirit of Madame Blavatsky. She had made pilgrimages to California's stucco jungles to hunt the astrological seer in his natural habitat. She had even consented to signing away the rights to one of her homes in order to be taken into the shouting order of a temple of amazing evangelists who had promised her golden smoke, crystal fire, and the great soft hand of God coming to bear her home.

None of these people had ever shaken Mrs. Bellowes' faith, even when she saw them sirened away in a black wagon in the night, or discovered their pictures, bleak and unromantic, in the morning tabloids. The world had roughed them up and locked them away because they knew too much, that was all.

And then, two weeks ago, she had seen Mr. Thirkell's advertisement in New York City:

COME TO MARS!

Stay at the Thirkell Restorium for one week. And then, on into space on the greatest adventure life can offer!

Send for Free Pamphlet: "Nearer My God To Thee."

Excursion rates. Round trip slightly lower.

"Round trip," Mrs. Bellowes had thought. "But who would come back after seeing *Him*?"

And so she had bought a ticket and flown off to Mars and spent seven mild days at Mr. Thirkell's Restorium, the building with the sign on it which flashed: THIRKELL'S ROCKET TO HEAVEN! She had spent the week bathing in limpid waters and erasing the care from her tiny bones, and now she was fidgeting, ready to be loaded into Mr. Thirkell's own special private rocket, like a bullet, to be fired on out into space beyond Jupiter and Saturn and Pluto. And thus—who could deny it?—you would be getting nearer and nearer to the Lord. How wonderful! Couldn't you just *feel* Him drawing near? Couldn't you just sense His breath, His scrutiny, His Presence?

"Here I am," said Mrs. Bellowes, "an ancient rickety elevator, ready to go up the shaft. God need only press the button."

Now, on the seventh day, as she minced up the steps of the Restorium, a number of small doubts assailed her.

"For one thing," she said aloud

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to no one, "it isn't quite the land of milk and honey here on Mars that they said it would be. My room is like a cell, the swimming pool is really quite inadequate, and, besides, how many widows who look like mushrooms or skeletons want to swim? And, finally, the whole Restorium smells of boiled cabbage and tennis shoes!"

She opened the front door and let it slam, somewhat irritably.

She was amazed at the other women in the auditorium. It was like wandering in a carnival mirror-maze, coming again and again upon yourself — the same floury face, the same chicken hands, and jingling bracelets. One after another of the images of herself floated before her. She put out her hand, but it wasn't a mirror; it was another lady shaking her fingers and saying:

"We're waiting for Mr. Thirkell. *Sh!*"

"Ah," whispered everyone.

The velvet curtains parted.

Mr. Thirkell appeared, fantastically serene, his Egyptian eyes upon everyone. But there was something, nevertheless, in his appearance which made one expect him to call "Hi!" while fuzzy dogs jumped over his legs, through his hooped arms, and over his back. Then, dogs and all, he should dance with a dazzling piano-keyboard smile off into the wings.

Mrs. Bellowes, with a secret part of her mind which she constantly had to grip tightly, expected to hear a cheap Chinese gong sound when Mr. Thirkell entered. His large liquid dark eyes were so improbable that one of the old ladies had facetiously claimed she saw a mosquito cloud hovering over them as they did around summer rain-barrels. And Mrs. Bellowes sometimes caught the scent of the theatrical mothball and the smell of calliope steam on his sharply pressed suit.

But with the same savage rationalization that had greeted all other disappointments in her rickety life, she bit at the suspicion and whispered, "This time it's *real*. This time it'll work. Haven't we got a *rocket?*"

Mr. Thirkell bowed. He smiled a sudden Comedy Mask smile. The old ladies looked in at his epiglottis and sensed chaos there.

Before he even began to speak, Mrs. Bellowes saw him picking up each of his words, oiling it, making sure it ran smooth on its rails. Her heart squeezed in like a tiny fist, and she gritted her porcelain teeth.

"Friends," said Mr. Thirkell, and you could hear the frost snap in the hearts of the entire assemblage.

"No!" said Mrs. Bellowes ahead of time. She could hear the bad news rushing at her, and

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herself tied to the track while the immense black wheels threatened and the whistle screamed, helpless.

"There will be a slight delay," said Mr. Thirkell.

In the next instant, Mr. Thirkell might have cried, or been tempted to cry, "Ladies, be seated!" in minstrel-fashion, for the ladies had come up at him from their chairs, protesting and trembling.

"Not a very long delay." Mr. Thirkell put up his hands to pat the air.

"How long?"

"Only a week."

"A week!"

"Yes. You can stay here at the Restorium for seven more days, can't you? A little delay won't matter, will it, in the end? You've waited a lifetime. Only a few more days."

At twenty dollars a day, thought Mrs. Bellowes, coldly.

"What's the trouble?" a woman cried.

"A legal difficulty," said Mr. Thirkell.

"We've a rocket, haven't we?"

"Well, ye-ess."

"But I've been here a whole month, waiting," said one old lady. "Delays, delays!"

"That's right," said everyone.

"Ladies, ladies," murmured Mr. Thirkell, smiling serenely.

"We want to see the rocket!"

It was Mrs. Bellowes forging ahead, alone, brandishing her fist like a toy hammer.

Mr. Thirkell looked into the old ladies' eyes, a missionary among albino cannibals.

"Well, now," he said.

"Yes, *now!*" cried Mrs. Bellowes.

"I'm afraid—" he began.

"So am I!" she said. "That's why we want to see the ship!"

"No, no, now, Mrs.—" He snapped his fingers for her name.

"Bellowes!" she cried. She was a small container, but now all the seething pressures that had been built up over long years came steaming through the delicate vents of her body. Her cheeks became incandescent. With a wail that was like a melancholy factory whistle, Mrs. Bellowes ran forward and hung to him, almost by her teeth, like a summer-maddened Spitz. She would not and never could let go until he died, and the other women followed, jumping and yapping like a pound let loose on its trainer, the same one who had petted them and to whom they had squirmed and whined joyfully an hour before, now milling about him, creasing his sleeves and frightening the Egyptian serenity from his gaze.

"This way!" cried Mrs. Bellowes, feeling like Madame Lafarge. "Through the back! We've

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waited long enough to see the ship. Every day he's put us off, every day we've waited, now let's see."

"No, no, ladies!" cried Mr. Thirkell, leaping about.

They burst through the back of the stage and out a door, like a flood, bearing the poor man with them into a shed, and then out, quite suddenly, into an abandoned gymnasium.

"There it is!" said someone. "The rocket."

And then a silence fell that was terrible to entertain.

There was the rocket.

Mrs. Bellowes looked at it and her hands sagged away from Mr. Thirkell's collar.

The rocket was something like a battered copper pot. There were a thousand bulges and rents and rusty pipes and dirty vents on and in it. The ports were clouded over with dust, resembling the eyes of a blind hog.

Everyone wailed a little sighing wail.

"Is that the rocket ship *Glory Be to the Highest?*" cried Mrs. Bellowes, appalled.

Mr. Thirkell nodded and looked at his feet.

"For which we paid out our one thousand dollars apiece and came all the way to Mars to get on board with you and go off to find Him?" asked Mrs. Bellowes.

"Why, that isn't worth a sack of dried peas," said Mrs. Bellowes.

"It's nothing but junk!"

Junk, whispered everyone, getting hysterical.

"Don't let him get away!"

Mr. Thirkell tried to break and run, but a thousand possum traps closed on him from every side. He withered.

Everybody walked around in circles like blind mice. There was a confusion and a weeping that lasted for five minutes as they went over and touched the Rocket, the Dented Kettle, the Rusty Container for God's Children.

"Well," said Mrs. Bellowes. She stepped up into the askew doorway of the rocket and faced everyone. "It looks as if a terrible thing has been done to us," she said. "I haven't any money to go back home to Earth and I've too much pride to go to the Government and tell them a common man like this has fooled us out of our life's savings. I don't know how you feel about it, all of you, but the reason all of us came is because I'm eighty-five, and you're eighty-nine, and you're seventy-eight, and all of us are nudging on toward a hundred, and there's nothing on Earth for us, and it doesn't appear there's anything on Mars either. We all expected not to breathe much more air or crochet many

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more doilies or we'd never have come here. So what I have to propose is a simple thing — to take a chance."

She reached out and touched the rusted hulk of the rocket.

"This is *our* rocket. We paid for our trip. And we're going to *take* our trip!"

Everyone rustled and stood on tiptoes and opened an astonished mouth.

Mr. Thirkell began to cry. He did it quite easily and very effectively.

"We're going to get in this ship," said Mrs. Bellowes, ignoring him. "And we're going to take off to where we were going."

Mr. Thirkell stopped crying long enough to say, "But it was all a fake. I don't know anything about space. He's not out there, anyway. I lied. I don't know where He is, and I couldn't find Him if I wanted to. And you were fools to ever take my word on it."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bellowes, "we were fools. I'll go along on that. But you can't blame us, for we're old, and it was a lovely, good and fine idea, one of the loveliest ideas in the world. Oh, we didn't really fool ourselves that we could get nearer to Him physically. It was the gentle, mad dream of old people, the kind of thing you hold onto for a few minutes a day, even though you know it's not true. So, all of you who want to go, you follow me in the ship."

"But you can't go!" said Mr. Thirkell. "You haven't got a navigator. And that ship's a ruin!"

"You," said Mrs. Bellowes, "will be the navigator."

She stepped into the ship, and after a moment, the other old ladies pressed forward. Mr. Thirkell, windmilling his arms frantically, was nevertheless pressed through the port, and in a minute the door slammed shut. Mr. Thirkell was strapped into the navigator's seat, with everyone talking at once and holding him down. The special helmets were issued to be fitted over every gray or white head to supply extra oxygen in case of a leakage in the ship's hull, and at long last the hour had come and Mrs. Bellowes stood behind Mr. Thirkell and said, "We're ready, sir."

He said nothing. He pleaded with them silently, using his great, dark, wet eyes, but Mrs. Bellowes shook her head and pointed to the control.

"Takeoff," agreed Mr. Thirkell morosely, and pulled a switch.

Everybody fell. The rocket went up from the planet Mars in a great fiery glide, with the noise of an entire kitchen thrown down an elevator shaft, with a sound of pots and pans and kettles and fires boiling and stews bubbling, with a smell of burned incense

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and rubber and sulphur, with a color of yellow fire, and a ribbon of red stretching below them, and all the old women singing and holding to each other, and Mrs. Bellowes crawling upright in the sighing, straining, trembling ship.

"Head for space, Mr. Thirkell."

"It can't last," said Mr. Thirkell, sadly. "This ship can't last. It will—"

It did.

The rocket exploded.

Mrs. Bellowes felt herself lifted and thrown about dizzily, like a doll. She heard the great screamings and saw the flashes of bodies sailing by her in fragments of metal and powdery light.

"Help, help!" cried Mr. Thirkell, far away, on a small radio beam.

The ship disintegrated into a million parts, and the old ladies, all one hundred of them, were flung straight on ahead with the same velocity as the ship.

As for Mr. Thirkell, for some reason of trajectory, perhaps, he had been blown out the other side of the ship. Mrs. Bellowes saw him falling separate and away from them, screaming, screaming.

There goes Mr. Thirkell, thought Mrs. Bellowes.

And she knew where he was going. He was going to be burned and roasted and broiled good, but very good.

Mr. Thirkell was falling down into the Sun.

And here we are, thought Mrs. Bellowes. *Here we are, going on out, and out, and out.*

There was hardly a sense of motion at all, but she knew that she was traveling at fifty thousand miles an hour and would continue to travel at that speed for an eternity, until . . .

She saw the other women swinging all about her in their own trajectories, a few minutes of oxygen left to each of them in their helmets, and each was looking up to where they were going.

Of course, thought Mrs. Bellowes. *Out into space. Out and out, and the darkness like a great church, and the stars like candles, and in spite of everything, Mr. Thirkell, the rocket, and the dishonesty, we are going toward the Lord.*

And there, yes, *there,* as she fell on and on, coming toward her, she could almost discern the outline now, coming toward her was His mighty golden hand, reaching down to hold her and comfort her like a frightened sparrow . . .

"I'm Mrs. Amelia Bellowes," she said quietly, in her best company voice. "I'm from the planet Earth."

—RAY BRADBURY

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(*Continued from Page 2*)

they do not, let me add this:

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